

"I Am Here!" Lagardére

Or, The Hunchback Of Paris



PAUL FÉVAL

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"I AM HERE."

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LAGARDÉRE;

OR, THE

HUNCHBACK OF PARIS..

BY

PAUL FÉVAD.



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LAGARDÈRE;

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HUNCHBACK OF PARIS.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHATEAU OF CAYLUS.

THE Vale of Louron, once the city of Loire, with its pagan temples, amphitheatres, and capitol, is now a desert where the idle plough of the Gascon peasant often blunts itself against the marble ruins of the past. A deep cleft in the snowy Pyrenees makes a road for the Venerquean smugglers.

Some leagues off, Paris coughs, dances, jokes, and dreams that it cures its incurable bronchitis, at Bagnères de Luchon. On the other side, rheumatic Paris hopes to leave its sciatica in the sulphurous baths of Barèges les Bains. Faith saves Paris, in spite of iron, magnesia, and sulphur.

The Vale of Louron, the farthest limit of Gascony, spreads out like a fan between the forest of Ens and the fine woods of Frechet. The forest borders a rocky hill, rising near the centre of the valley, one precipitous side of which is watered by the dark tide of the river Clarabide. On this hill are the ruins of the ancient castle of Caylus. Tradition reports that the Marquis of Caylus, its rich proprietor, raised the rampart round the little village of Tarrides to protect his Huguenot vassals after the abjuration of Henry the Fourth. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the family of Caylus-Tarrides became extinct. Francois de Tarrides, the last of his race, belongs to our story.

In 1699, the Marquis was a man about sixty, who in his youth had followed, without success, the court of Louis XIV., and had retired discontented from the scene of

splendor and folly. He now lived on his estates with his only daughter, the beautiful Blanche de Caylus. He was nick-named Caylus the Gaoler, for the following reason.

When about forty, and a widower, he fell in love with the beautiful daughter of Soto Mayor, governor of Pampeluna. Inez de Soto Mayor was a lovely Spanish girl of seventeen, whose liquid dark eyes revealed her ardent nature. It was said that the Marquis had not rendered his first wife very happy. He kept her always shut up in the old castle, and she died at the age of twenty-five. She told her father she would never marry the Marquis. But, in Spain, what account is made of a young girl's will?

One beautiful evening, Inez, hidden behind her Venetian blinds, listened for the last time to the serenade of the Corregidor's son. The next day she accompanied the Marquis to France; he took her without a dowry, and moreover, gave a large sum to her father.

When the Marquis brought his young and lovely wife to the castle, there was a great desire to see her, but in vain. The beautiful Inez, confined like a prisoner within the fortress, was unapproachable. In a few years death opened her prison-house. She died of solitude and ennui, leaving an only daughter. After the death of his second wife, the Marquis wished to marry again. But the governor of the Pampeluna had no more daughters, and the Marquis' reputation as a gaoler was so well established that the most intrepid of the young ladies he sought dared not venture to listen to his prayers. So he re-

mained a widower awaiting with impatience the time when his daughter would need to be padlocked. The neighboring gentry did not like him, and he often, notwithstanding his riches, lacked company. Ennui drove him forth from his dungeon. Every year he went to Paris, where the young courtiers borrowed his money and made game of him. During his absence, Bianchi was left in the charge of two or three duennas and an old chaplain.

Blanche was as beautiful as her mother. When she was seventeen, the villagers of Tarrides often, in the dark nights, heard the dogs at Caylus bark. About this time, Philip of Nevers, one of the most brilliant noblemen of the court, came to reside at his castle of Buch, in the Juranson. The mountain air restored him, and he soon followed the chase as far as the valley of Louron. The first time that the dogs of Caylus barked, the young duke, overcome with fatigue, had sought shelter in the woodman's cottage.

Nevers remained one year at the castle of Buch. The shepherds of Tarrides lauded his generosity, and related two nocturnal adventures during his residence.

Once, at midnight, there were lights seen in the chapel of Caylus. The dogs had not barked, but a dark figure, which the villagers had often seen before, passed through the brushwood after nightfall. These old castles are full of phantoms. Another time—also at night—Dame Martha, the youngest of the Caylus duennas, rushed from the castle to the woodman's cottage; and a litter soon after passed through the woods of the Ens. The next day, the woodman's cottage was deserted, its master had gone no one knew whither, and Dame Martha was no more seen at the castle of Caylus.

Four years passed. Philip of Nevers was no longer at his mansion of Buch; but another Philip, not less noble and brilliant, honored the Vale of Louron with his presence—Philip Polixenes of Mantua, Prince of Gonzagues, to whom the Marquis of Caylus intended to give his daughter Aurora in marriage.

Gonzagues was about thirty years of age, with fine, though rather effeminate features, and a noble presence. His dark hair fell in heavy curls round his white forehead; his large, brilliant eyes shone with Italian pride. He was tall, of an elegant figure, and his gestures had almost theatri-

cal majesty and display. His birth was illustrious; for the house of Gonzagues vied in nobility with the Bourbons and Montmorencys.

His friends were equally noble. One was a member of the house of Lorraine, the other was a Bourbon. The Duke of Chartres, nephew to Louis XIV., afterwards Duke of Orleans and Regent of France, the Duke of Nevers, and the Prince of Gonzagues, were inseparable friends. They were called at court the three Philips. Philip Gonzagues was the eldest, the future Regent was in his twenty-fifth year, the Duke of Nevers was a year younger.

One may well think how greatly the prospect of such a son-in-law flattered the pride of the old Marquis. Gonzagues was said to have immense estates in Italy; moreover, he was cousin-german and only heir of Nevers, who, everyone thought, was destined for an early grave. Philip of Nevers possessed one of the richest domains in France. No one, certainly, suspected the Prince Gonzagues of desiring his friend's death; but it was out of his power to prevent it, and that death would put him in possession of millions. The Marquis and the intended bridegroom had nearly settled the matter; as to Blancheshe had not even been consulted.

It was a beautiful day in autumn. Louis XIV. growing old and tired of war, the peace of Ryswick had been concluded; still, skirmishes continued on the frontier, and the Vale of Louron was not free from marauders. In the dining-hall of the castle of Caylus, about half-a-dozen guests were assembled round a well-spread table. The Marquis had his faults, but at least he made a capital host. With the exception of the Marquis, Gonzagues, and Aurora, the other guests were of middle rank, and dependants. Firstly, Don Bernard, chaplain of Caylus, who had also spiritual charge of the little village of Tarrides, and who kept in the sacristy of his chapel the registry of births, deaths, and marriages. Next, Peyrolles, a gentleman in the suite of the Prince of Gonzagues.

This man plays an important part in our story, therefore we must describe him. He was a middle-aged man, with a thin, pale face and scanty hair, and a tall and rather stooping figure. One can scarcely fancy such a man in our day without spectacles; but at that time they were not in fashion. Gravity was the only expression of his insignificant features. Gonza-

gues said that M. Peyrolles could make good use of the sword that hung awkwardly at his side. It was to be observed, that the Prince always praised his devoted follower; he was no doubt very useful to him.

Blanche de Caylus did the honors with a cold, reserved dignity. In general, women—even the most beautiful—are what their feelings make them. A woman may be adorable to the one she loves, and almost displeasing to others. But Blanchewas one of those lovely creatures who please against their will, and are admired in spite of themselves. She wore the Spanish dress, and voluminous folds of lace fell over the shining jet of her hair.

Although not yet twenty, the beautiful curves round her mouth already bespoke sadness. But what loveliness would a smile bring to those pure lips—what brilliancy to those soft eyes, heavily shaded with their long silken lashes! But, alas! it was a long time since a smile had played over that sweet face. Her father said to himself, "It will all change when she becomes Princess de Gonzagues," and took no further notice.

At the end of the second course Blanche rose, and asked permission to retire. Dame Isidore cast a longing look at the pastry and sweetments; but it was her duty to follow her young mistress.

As Blanche left the room, the Marquis assumed a more jaunty air.

"Prince," he said, "you owe me my revenge at chess—are you ready?"

"Always at your service, dear Marquis," answered Gonzagues.

Caylus ordered the chessmen to be brought.

This was the hundred and fiftieth game that Caylus and Gonzagues had played during the fortnight that the Prince had been at the castle.

At thirty, with his figure, wealth, and station, this violent passion for chess upon the part of the Prince of Gonzagues denoted either an ardent attachment to Blanche—or to her dowry.

Every day after dinner, as well as after supper, the chessboard was brought. The Marquis of Caylus had the skill of a lad of fourteen. Every day Gonzagues allowed himself to lose a dozen games, after which the Marquis triumphantly fell asleep. Thus Gonzagues paid his court to the fair Blanche.

At the end of the first game, Gonzagues made a sign to Peyrolles, who went out;

and the others shortly followed his example.

"You did not finish, yesterday," said Gonzagues, "the story of that gentleman who tried to get into the castle."

"Ah, I see, you wish to distract my attention from the game; but it won't do," exclaimed the Marquis, laughing. "Well, that gentleman had half-a-dozen sword-cuts in the ditch yonder. This has happened more than once, so even scandal could never assai the reputation of the ladies of Caylus."

"And what you then did as a husband, would you now do as a father?" asked Gonzagues, negligently.

"Assuredly," answered Caylus. "I know no other means of guarding Eve's daughters. *Schah mato*, Prince, as the Persians say (*Schah mato* means, you know 'The king is dead,' which phrase we have corrupted into checkmate). As for women, believe me, good swords and strong walls—in those are the essence of their virtue."

After saying this, the Marquis sank back in his easy chair, and dropped asleep.

Gonzagues instantly left the dining hall.

It was two hours after noon. Peyrolles was waiting for his master in the corridor.

"Well, friend—our knaves?" inquired Gonzagues, as soon as he perceived his follower.

"Six have arrived," answered Peyrolles.

"Where are they?"

"At the Adam and Eve, on the other side of the valley.

"Who are the two absent?"

"Master Cocardasse, junior, of Tarbes, and Brother Passepoil, his assistant."

"Two good swordsmen," said the Prince.

"And the other affair?"

"Donna Martha is now with Mademoiselle de Caylus."

"With the child?"

"With the child."

"How did she enter?"

"By the cellar window, which looks into the trenches beneath the bridge."

Gonzagues reflected a moment, then said:

"Have you questioned Don Bernard?"

"He is mute," answered Peyrolles.

"How much did you offer?"

"Five hundred pistoles"

"Donna Martha must know where the register is. She must not leave the castle."

"Very well," said Peyrolles.

Gonzagues paced rapidly to and fro.

"I wish to speak to her myself," he

murmured ; "but are you quite sure that my cousin Nevers received Blancho's message?"

"Our German took it."

"And Nevers will come?"

"To-night."

They were at the entrance of the Princess apartments. At the castle of Caylus three passages crossed each other at right angles, one down the centre, the other along the two wings. The Prince's apartments were situated in the western wing. At the end of the corridor was the staircase leading to the cellars.

A noise was heard in the centre gallery. Donna Martha came out of Mademoiselle de Caylus's apartments, and with a furtive but rapid step passed along the passage. It was the hour of repose; the Spanish fashion of siesta had crossed the Pyrenees. Every one was asleep in the castle. Donna Martha had reason to believe that she would meet no one. But as she passed before the door of the Prince's apartments Peyrolles rushed out suddenly upon her, thrust a handkerchief into her mouth to prevent her cries, and carried her, half-fainting, into his master's room.

CHAPTER II.

COCARDASSE AND PASSEPOIL.

THE first, bestriding a sorry cart-horse, carried himself proudly. He wore a buff coat, and cuirass; large funnel-shaped boots after the fashion of Louis XIII.; he had, moreover, a felt hat and an enormous sword. He was Master Cocardasse, junior, native of Toulouse, formerly fencing-master in Paris—lately established at Tarbes, with but indifferent success.

The latter looked timid and humble. He was dressed in shabby black; his cloth cap was pulled over his ears; and, notwithstanding the sultry heat, he had on a pair of furred boots, and sat sideways on a donkey.

Master Cocardasse rejoiced in large, fierce moustachioe, and hair as black as a negro's; while his companion, on the contrary, had only a few scanty locks, and two or three bristles of a tawny yellow under his long nose. This peaceable-looking traveller was, nevertheless, assistant fencing-master: and on occasion, could handle vigorously the large unwieldy sword that knocked against his donkey's sides.

His name was Amable Passepoil, a native of Villedieu in Normandy—as famous as Condé-sur-Noireau for its boon companions. His friends called him Friar Passepoil, from his clerical appearance. He was as ugly as sin, notwithstanding the sentimental air he put on whenever a red serge petticoat crossed his path; while, on the other hand, Cocardasse would everywhere pass for a fine-looking fellow.

Onward they toiled under a mid-day sun. Every stone in the road made Cocardasse's nag stumble; and 'every now and then a fit of obstinacy seized Passepoil's donkey.

"Oh!" exclaimed Cocardasse, "I declare that for these two hours we have had that confounded castle and its bill before us, and it seems no nearer yet."

"Patience!" cried Passepoil; "we shall arrive soon enough for what we get to do."

"Fire and fury!" said the Gascon with a sigh, "if we had only gone on better, with our talents, we might have chosen our work."

"Just so, friend," replied the Norman; "our passions have been our ruin. Gambling, drinking—"

"And the fair sex!" added Passepoil, looking upward.

They were passing now the banks of the river in the valley of Louron, and the steep hill before them was crowned by the lofty battlements of the castle of Caylus. Right and left of its two high towers extended deep trenches, formerly filled with water.

Outside of the northern wall were a few scattered houses of the hamlet of Tarrides. Within arose the taper spire of the chapel, with its pointed windows in the early Norman style.

The castle of Caylus was the wonder of the Pyrenean valleys; but Cocardasse and Passepoil had no tastes for the fine arts.

This Cocardasse was, no doubt, a jolly fellow when his purse was full; and his companion even had an air of stupid good humor: but to-day they were both sad, and with good reason, too.

Hungry stomachs, empty purses, and dangerous work before them.

"Oh!" exclaimed Cocardasse, "I'll never touch another card or drink another glass."

"And I'll never fall in love," sighed the tender Passepoil.

"I will buy a complete outfit," cried Cocardasse, with enthusiasm, "and join the company of the Little Parisian."

"I, too," rejoined Passepoil, "as soldier or surgeon's assistant."

"Should not I make a hussar?"

"The regiment that I entered might ensure being well bled."

And then both continued, speaking one after the other, in a transport of enthusiasm :

"We should see our Little Parisian again."

"We would spare him a blow now and then."

"He would call me his old Cocardasse."

"And he would laugh at Friar Passepoil as he used to do."

"Yes, friend," cried the Gascon, giving a kick to his tired horse; "we are down in the world now; but I feel that with the little Parisian I should amend my ways."

Passepoil shook his head sadly.

"Who knows that he would recognise us now?" he said, desponding.

"Oh," rejoined Cocardasse, "he has some heart, that fellow."

"What a fencer!" sighed Passepoil; "and what readiness!"

"What a swordsman!—what action!"

"Do you recollect his back thrust in retreat?"

"And his three thrusts to the right?"

"Oh, a splendid fellow!—lucky at cards and able to drink like a fish."

"And handsome enough to turn the heads of half the women."

At each reply both friends grew warmer and stopped to give each other a hearty shake of the hand.

"By my honor and word," cried Cocardasse, "we will be his servants, if he wishes."

"And we will make him a great lord," added Passepoil; "and then Peyrolles' money will bring us good luck."

So it was Monsieur Peyrolles, the confidential friend of Philip de Gonzague, who caused Master Cocardasse and Friar Passepoil's journey.

They were well acquainted with Peyrolles, and still better with his master; for they had kept a fencing-school at Paris, and perhaps might have made a fortune—for all the Court went to them—had it not been for the disorders their sins caused in their affairs. Some sad pranks had forced them to leave Paris; but let us be merciful, and not expose them. In that day Parisian fencing-masters were the familiar companions of the proudest nobles, and often knew both sides of the cards better than the courtiers themselves.

Leaving Tarbes, Passepoil had said,

"Nevers is the first swordsman in Europe after the Little Parisian. If it concerns Nevers, they must be generous."

It was two hours after mid-day when they reached Tarrives, and were directed to the inn of Adam and Eve.

On their entrance, the lower room was already nearly full. A young girl waited on six thirsty guests, who had come a long way under a sultry sun.

Six good swords and their belongings hung against the wall.

Each man had bully written in legible character on his bronzed face and fierce moustachios. At the table next the door were three Spaniards, judging from their faces. At the next table an Italian, with a scar right across his face. Opposite to him was a sinister-looking German. The third table was appropriated by a churl with long, rough hair, with a strong Breton accent. The three Spaniards were called Saldague, Pinto, and Pepe, or the Bullfighter; the Italian's name was Guiseppe Faenza; the German, Staupitz; the Breton, Joel de Jugan. Peyrolles had assembled them all.

When Cocardasse and Passepoil entered, they started back at the sight of this respectable company, who in rough voices cried out—"Master Cocardasse!" "Friar Passepoil!" with appropriate oaths.

"Sure enough," rejoined Cocardasse, "all boon companions!"

"And old friends," added Passepoil, in a trembling voice.

He was a coward by nature, whom want had made brave.

Much shaking of hands followed.

Before the arrival of our two friends, the groups had kept their distance. The Breton knew no one; the German only talked to the Italian, and the three Spaniards held themselves proudly apart.

Cocardasse and Passepoil formed a connecting link which united these groups, so well fitted to understand and appreciate each other. The ice was broken, and introductions made. Each knew the other by reputation.

It was frightful to think, that the six swords hanging against the wall had killed more men than all the executioners of France and Navarre. The Breton, had he been an Indian, might have had three dozen scalps around his waist; the Italian might have seen some twenty ghosts of his victims in his dreams. The German had murdered noblemen of all grades, worthy

citizens, lawyers, doctors, and poets. But these were nothing to the three Spaniards, who might have bathed in the blood of their victims.

When the first drinking-bout was over, and the buzz of the boasting voices of these hired assassins a little calmed, Cocardasse said—

"Now, my friends, let's to business."

More wine was called for, and the trembling girl dismissed.

Passepoil sighed.

"Now, my masters," continued Cocardasse, "we did not expect to meet such good company here, so far from cities, where your talents are best paid."

"Alas!" cried the Italian, "where can we find work?"

All shook their heads mournfully.

"Do you know why we are here?" asked one of the Spaniards.

The Gascon was about to answer, when Passepoil touched his foot. Cocardasse was accustomed to follow his lieutenant's advice.

"I know," he answered, "we have been brought here; and for ordinary cases, Passepoil and I are enough."

"What, senors?" cried the Bullfighter. "When I am in a business a second is not wanted!"

"Are we wanted to fight a whole army, then?" demanded Cocardasse.

"No," answered the German; "only one man."

Staupitz, the German, was in the service of Peyrolles, the confidential friend of Philip de Gonzagues.

A boisterous laugh followed this announcement. Cocardasse and Passepoil laughed louder than the rest.

"And who is the giant who is to fight against eight?" asked Passepoil.

"Philip, Duke of Nevers," Staupitz answered.

"But he is ill!" cried one.

"Consumptive!" cried a second.

"Dying!" added a third.

Cocardasse and Passepoil pushed back their glasses and were silent.

"What is the matter?" cried the others.

"It looks if you would like to give up the game!" added Faenza.

"And not far from the mark, my master, either," replied Cocardasse, gravely.

A thunder of voices followed.

"We have seen Philip of Nevers at Paris," continued Passepoil, gently. "He's a

dying man who may cut a few heads off yet."

The rest shrugged their shoulders with disdain.

"I see," said Cocardasse, "you have never heard of the thrust of Nevers."

All stared.

"The thrust of old Delapalme, which did for seven fencers between the Route and the Gate of St. Honoré," continued the fencing-master.

All listened, and ceased laughing.

"It is well we are all here," continued Cocardasse, solemnly. "You talk of an army—for my part, I would rather meet one. There is only one man in the world who could cross swords with Philip of Nevers."

"And who is that man?" cried six voices at once.

"The Little Parisian," answered Cocardasse.

"Ah! he is the devil himself!" cried Passepoil, with enthusiasm.

"The Little Parisian—what's his name?" cried the rest.

"A name which you all know, my friends. He calls himself the Chevalier de Lagardère."

All knew the name and were silent.

"I have never encountered him," said Saldaque.

"All the better for you," returned the Gascon.

"He is called the handsome Lagardère," said Pinto.

"He killed three Flemish soldiers under the walls of Senlis."

"It was he ——" continued a third.

But Cocardasse interrupted him, saying emphatically—

"There are not two Lagardères."

CHAPTER III.

THE THREE PHILIPS.

THE only window of the public room at the Adam and Eve looked on to a sloping bank planted with beeches, which extended to the trenches of Caylus. A cart-road crossed the wood, and ended in a wooden bridge thrown over these trenches, which, no longer filled with water, bore a good crop of hay, which had just been cut. There was only one entrance to them, which was on the road before the inn.

The ramparts that bounded these trenches were pierced with numerous gun-holes, but only one of them was large enough for a man to pass through. This was a low window, well barred, near the bridge.

It was now three o'clock; and the eight friends, having recovered their spirits, resumed their talk but had not yet come to blows, when Stampitz cried—

"Hush, comrades! here is Peyrolles."

The factotum of the Duke de Gonzagues had indeed arrived on horseback at the door of the inn.

"Friends," said Passepoil, quickly, "Nevers and his secret thrust are worth their price—what say you to make your fortunes at once, my masters?"

"Who would say no?" cried all at once.

"Well, then, leave matters to Cocardasse and me, and whatever we say to Peyrolles, support us."

"Agreed!" answered all in chorus.

Peyrolles entered. Passepoil took off his hat respectfully; the others did the same. Peyrolles had a heavy bag of gold in his hand. He threw it on the table.

"Here, my fine fellows," he cried, "here is your pay!"

Then casting a rapid glance upon each member of the party, he said—

"Now, my lads, I will tell you in two words what you have to do."

"All attention, good Master Peyrolles," said Cocardasse with his elbows on the table.

"All attention," repeated the rest.

"This evening," continued Peyrolles, "about eight o'clock, a man will come by that road that you see under the window; he will be on horseback, and will fasten his horse by the bridge, leap the ditch, and do you see that barred window there?"

"Certainly, Master Peyrolles," answered Cocardasse, "we are not blind."

"The man will go to that window."

"And at the same moment we are to accost him?"

"Politely," said Peyrolles with a sinister smile, "and your money is gained?"

"Fire and fury!" cried Cocardasse, "Master Peyrolles always has his joke."

"Is it agreed?"

"Certainly; but you won't leave us so soon?"

"My friends, I am in a hurry," said Peyrolles, retreating.

"What!" cried Cocardasse, "without telling us the name of the man we are to accost?"

"What matters the name?"

Cocardasse gave a signal. A general murmur of discontent arose.

"Without having even given us the name of our honorable employer?" repeated Cocardasse.

Peyrolles looked at him with alarm.

"What is that to you?" he replied, assuming a high tone.

"It is a great deal to us, good Master Peyrolles."

"I cannot see that it concerns you; since you are well paid?"

"Perhaps we are not paid enough."

"What is it, friend?"

Cocardasse rose; the rest followed his example.

"Fire and fury!" he cried; "let's to the point; we are all gentlemen, and want to know how we stand."

Passepoil pushed a chair towards Peyrolles; the others applauded warmly.

"My friends, since you wish so much to know, could you not easily have guessed? To whom does this castle belong?"

"To the Marquis of Caylus, whose wives die young; to Caylus the Gaoler."

"Well then, you work for the Marquis?"

"Do you believe this?" cried Cocardasse, insolently, to the rest.

"No," answered Passepoil.

"No," echoed the rest.

Peyrolles' hollow cheeks reddened.

"How, fellows?" he cried.

"Quite right; my friends object," said the Gascon. "Let us discuss the thing calmly. If I understand you, this is how the matter stands. The Marquis has learnt that a fine handsome fellow visited his castle by night, and used to enter by that lower window. Is that it?"

Peyrolles assented.

"He knows that his daughter loves this gentleman."

"The whole truth," said the factotum.

"Thus you explain our being here. This may seem plausible to some, but it is not so to me. You have told us a lie, Master Peyrolles."

"The devil!" cried the other, "this is too insolent!"

"Go on, Cocardasse, go on!" cried the boon companions, with one voice.

"Well," said the Gascon, nothing loath, "my friends and I all know that this nightly visitor recommended to our good offices is nothing less than a prince!"

"A prince?" said Peyrolles, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, Philip of Lorraine, Duke of Nevers."

"You know more than I do then," said the factotum, with pretended carelessness.

"Indeed, but that is not all; there is another thing, which perhaps my noble friends don't know. Blanche de Caylus is not the mistress of the Prince."

"Oh!" cried Peyrolles.

"She is his wife!" said the Gascon, resolutely.

Peyrolles turned pale, and muttered, "How did you know that?"

"I know it for certain—it little matters how; but I have not done yet. Four years ago a secret marriage took place in the chapel of Caylus, and, if I am well informed, you and your master were witnesses."

Peyrolles did not deny this.

"What are you driving at?" he stammered.

"To find out," replied the Gascon, "what noble master we are to serve to-night."

"Nevers has married the daughter without the father's consent. What more natural than that the Marquis of Caylus should revenge himself?"

"Nothing more natural, if the good gentleman knew of his daughter's secret marriage—which he does not. He is not such a fool as to reject the first nobleman in France for a son-in-law. If the Prince had said to him, 'The King wants me to marry the Princess of Savoy, but I have secretly married your daughter,' all might have been easily arranged. But the reputation of the Marquis made Philip de Nevers fear for his wife, whom he adores."

"Well, the end of all this—?" interrupted Peyrolles.

"Is that we are not working for M. de Caylus."

"It is clear," said Passepoil.

"As day," grumbled the chorus.

"Whom do you work for, then?" asked Peyrolles, savagely.

"Ah, my friend, we are coming to that. Do you know the story of the three Philips? I'll tell it you in two words. They are three noble gentlemen. One is Philip of Mantua, Prince of Gonzagues—your master, Master Peyrolles, who is ruined, and gone to the devil; the second is Philip of Nevers, whom we are waiting for; the third is Philip of France, duke of Chartres. All three young, handsome, clever. The strongest friendship unites the three Philips, it is said; but leaving the king's nephew out of the question, let us speak

only of Nevers and Gonzagues, Damon and Pythias."

"Zounds!" cried Peyrolles, "you would not accuse Damon of killing Pythias?"

"Oh, the real Damon was not ruined, and the real Pythias had not six hundred thousand crowns a year."

"Which our Pythias has, and our Damon would inherit," said Passepoil.

"And the true Pythias had not a lovely mistress like Blanche Caylus, with whom Damon was in love," added Cocardasse, filling his glass. "I drink to Damon, otherwise Gonzague, who would have a fine fortune, and perhaps the lady, if Pythias, otherwise Nevers, happened to die to-night."

"To Prince Damon's health!" cried the rest.

"Well, what say you to that, Master Peyrolles?" said Cocardasse, triumphantly.

"I say that you lie," muttered the factotum. "The Prince of Gonzagues is too far above such an infamous slander to need exculpation."

"Passepoil," cried Cocardasse, "as Master Peyrolles won't give in, it is your turn to tackle him now."

Blushing to the ears, and in a timid voice, Passepoil began:

"I only know that three years ago, while the three Philips led so joyous a life at Paris, that the king threatened to send his nephew away; I was in the service of an Italian doctor, Pierre Garbo——"

"I knew the man," interrupted Faenza. "He was a black-hearted villain."

Passepoil smiled.

"He was very learned, and used to compose a certain potion that he called 'The Elixir of Life.'"

The bullies laughed.

"Go on," cried Cocardasse.

Peyrolles wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Prince Philip de Gonzagues often came to see my master, and about this time the young Nevers was taken ill."

"It is a base calumny," cried Peyrolles.

"Have I accused any one?" said Passepoil, innocently.

The confidant bit his lip.

"You must allow me to retire, if you please," he said.

"Assuredly," cried the Gascon laughing, "and we'll escort you to the castle and speak to the Marquis."

Peyrolles turned livid, and threw himself in a chair.

"Go on, Passepoil," said Cocardasse.

"They said the young duke was likely to die," continued Passepoil, "the king was uneasy; the duke of Chartres inconsolable."

"Gonzagues was still more inconsolable," added the confidant.

"I don't deny it," said Passepoil; "in proof of his grief, he came every evening to my master, disguised as a servant, and always said 'It is very long, doctor—very long!'"

Every man in the room was a murderer, yet all shuddered.

"One night," continued Passepoil, "the Prince came earlier. Nevers fenced to-day, and can no longer hold a sword," he said. "Then," said the doctor, "the end is coming—perhaps to-morrow." But the very next day the duke of Chartres carried Nevers off with him to Touraine. As my master was not there, Nevers got well, and afterwards went on to Naples. Gonzagues came and asked my master to take a journey there, and he was getting ready to start, when unluckily, the alembic burst and my poor master died from inhaling his own Elixir. But to finish my story. After a year and a half, Nevers returned, strong as a lion; and you all know that, after Lagardère, he is the first swordsman in the world."

"So good a swordsman, that Gonzagues thinks it necessary to employ eight swords against him," said Cocardasse, with a mocking laugh.

"What do you want?" cried Peyrolles; "more money?"

"Much more," answered Cocardasse; "a father avenging his daughter's honor pays much less than a gentleman who wishes to inherit his friend's fortune, without any further delay."

"What do you require?"

"Triple the sum in that canvas bag," replied Cocardasse, pointing to the bag of money which still lay on the table.

"Agreed!" said Peyrolles; "anything more?"

"Yes; we shall require to be taken into your master's service."

"Be it so!" said the factotum.

"And thirdly—" added Cocardasse.

"If you ask too much—" began Peyrolles.

"If the king's nephew should seek to avenge his friend?"

"In that case," said Peyrolles, "we should all go into Italy."

Cocardasse consulted Passepoil and the rest in hurried whispers.

"It's a bargain," he said, after this brief consultation.

Peyrolles held out his hand; the other touched his sword.

"The bargain is struck," he cried; "I answer for the fidelity of my comrades; and now let us finish our wine!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE PARISIAN.

AFTER Peyrolles' departure, the boon companions continued their carouse.

"Who is the Little Parisian?" asked Saldaque.

"Another glass, and I will tell you his history," answered Cocardasse; "though there's not much in it. By birth he is as noble as the King, though no one ever knew his father or mother. He was a boy of twelve when I first met him in the Palais Royal, beset by a dozen vagabonds older than himself, who wanted to rob a poor old woman who sold cheesecakes. I asked him his name?—Little Lagardère. His parents?—He had none. Who took care of him?—No one. Where did he live?—In the ruined turret of the ancient castle of Lagardère. How did he keep himself?—By plunging for money off the bridge, and by playing all sorts of antics. I think I can see him now, mimicking the old beadle of St. Germaine, who was hump-backed.

"I took a fancy to the little fellow, and asked him if he would come with me. No, he said, because he took care of Mother-Bernard—a poor old woman to whom he brought all his money. Then I told him all the delights of a fencing school; his eyes glistened, and he said, with a sigh, 'When Mother Bernard dies, I'll come to you.' I thought no more of it; but sure enough, three years afterwards, he came. Some young noblemen made game of him; the Little Parisian soon floored them. He was so supple and agile, but as hard as iron. At a year's end he could cross swords with me.

"He became a soldier; he killed his captain, and deserted. He enlisted again, and served a campaign in Germany. At Breslau he went out alone, against orders and, brought back four prisoners. General Vil-

fare made him a cornet—he killed his officer, and was dismissed. What a fellow he was ! The General liked him, and sent him to tell the King the victory of Baden; the Duke of Anjou saw him, and made him page. The Duchess's ladies fell in love with him—he was dismissed. At last fortune smiled on him, and he became one of the King's Guards. Fire and fury ! I don't know why he quitted the Court. If for a woman, so much the better for her; if for a man, his knell is tolled !"

Cocardasse was silent—Passepoil applauded.

The sun was going down behind the trees, and the friends were already talking of retiring, when Saldaque, who was sitting near the window, saw a boy slide surreptitiously down the slope below the castle. He was about thirteen or fourteen, and wore the dress of a page. He had no badge but a courier's band around his waist.

" Pardieu !" said Carigue, " that's the second time we've seen that fellow. I've a strong suspicion that he's a spy. Suppose we go out and question him ?"

All agreeing, they divided in two companies, and took the only two roads to the ditch.

The boy seeing himself entrapped, did not attempt to escape.

" My good sirs," he cried, " do not kill me—I have nothing."

" Don't tell lies !" said Carigue; " you passed over the hills this morning."

" I !" said the page.

" Oh ! he comes straight from Agèle."

" Agèle !" repeated the boy.

" We won't hurt you, child," said Coocardasse ; " but to whom are you carrying that love-letter ?"

" Love-letter !" echoed the page.

" Let us search him," cried Carigue.

" Oh, no—don't search me !" said the boy, falling on his knees.

" What's your name ?" asked Cocardasse.

" Berichon."

" Who's your master ?"

There was no answer.

The men grew angry. Saldaque seized the boy by the collar. The page flung himself away from Saldaque, and drew a dagger scarcely larger than a plaything. He rushed between Faenza and Staupitz, and made off; but Passepoil caught him. Still he fought valiantly with his little weapon; he scratched Saldaque, and kicked Staupitz. But the odds were too much

against him; his persecutors' hands grasped him tight, when a thunderbolt at once dispersed them. One was thrown one way, one another; two or three measured their lengths on the ground.

One man alone caused this commotion, and he and the boy stood in the midst of the circle of astonished bullies.

" The rascal !" cried Cocardasse, getting up. But suddenly a smile curved his moustache.

" The Little Parisian !" exclaimed Passepoil.

" Captain Lagardère !" added the rest.

CHAPTER V.

THE THRUST OF NEVERS.

It was Lagardère—the breaker of heads, and the slayer of hearts.

The eight swordsmen did not dare to draw upon a young fellow of eighteen, who folded his arms and smiled. None of these hired assassins were cowards, but this man was Lagardère.

Cocardasse and Passepoil had not vaunted him too highly.

There he stood—noble, frank, valiant—brilliant in his youthful manhood, his shining chestnut hair falling round his broad white forehead. Dark eyebrows and eyelashes shaded his brilliant yet soft brown eyes; and a frequent and joyous smile played round his mouth, which was adorned by a soft moustache.

His figure was rather above middle height, and was at once supple, graceful, and vigorous.

He wore the elegant dress of the King's Life Guards—a little faded and worn, but relieved by a rich velvet mantle thrown negligently over one shoulder. The red scarf fringed with gold round his waist showed the rank he now held.

" Have you no shame," he cried, disdainfully, " that you can ill use a child ?"

" Captain—" began Saldaque.

" Be silent ! Who are these swashbucklers ?"

Cocardasse and Passepoil came to him, bat in hand.

" Oh ! my two protectors !" he exclaimed. " What brings you so far from home ?"

He held out his hand to them.

" And the others ? I have seen you somewhere," he said, turning to Staupitz.

"At Cologne—you poked me once," said the German, humbly.

"Ah! ah!" cried Lagardère. "And my two champions from Madrid, and this honest fellow, whose skull I broke with a stick! Gentlemen, we seem to have met before; but you found me tougher to deal with than this poor boy. Come here, child."

Berichon obeyed.

Cocardasse wished to explain why they wanted to search the page, but Lagardère imposed silence.

"What brought you here?" he asked the child.

"You are kind, and I will tell you," answered the boy. "I brought a letter."

"To whom?"

Berichon hesitated, and looked towards the window.

"To you," he answered.

"Give it me."

"And I have another letter."

"For whom?"

"For a lady."

Lagardère threw him his purse.

"Go, boy," he said; "no one will interfere with you."

The page set off, and disappeared behind the rampart.

Lagardère opened his letter.

"Bravo!" he cried. "This is what I call a gallant message. Nevers is a noble fellow!"

"Nevera!" they all cried. "What is it?"

Lagardère led the way back to the inn.

"Some wine," he said, "and I will tell you the story. Sit you here, Cocardasse and Passepoil; the others, where they can. I must tell you, then, that I am exiled from France."

"Wherefore?" cried several.

"You know the Baron of Ballinson? Well, he is dead. The King has ennobled me, you know, that I might be in his Guard; and I promised to behave well, and for six months I kept my word. But one night, that Ballinson tried to frighten a poor little cadet from the country, so I pulled his ear; and of course we fought, and he fell. There is justice for you! I deserved a reward, and, instead, I am outlawed."

All showed their sympathy, and agreed that the arts were not encouraged.

"Well," continued Lagardère, "I obey orders, and depart; but before I go, I have a fancy to fight a duel and have a love ad-

venture. Now, do you know the thrust of Nevers?"

Some said, old Master Delapalme had sold to the Duke a method of being quite certain of pinking a man in the middle of the forehead between the eyes.

"I thought nothing of secret thrusts," Lagardère continued, "before I encountered Nevers; and his confounded thrust broke my rest. And then everyone said this Nevers was so handsome, so brave; they were always talking of his horse, his arms, his luck at cards, and gallant adventures. All this troubled me; so I went and waited for his coming from the Louvre and I said:

"Sir, relying on your great courtesy, I have come to ask you to teach me your secret thrust."

"Who are you?" he said.

"I am Lagardère, of the King's Life Guards; formerly Corroet of Perre, Lieutenant of Conti, Captain in Nevers' Horse."

"Ah!" he cried, getting off his horse. "You are the handsome Lagardère! I am tired of bearing your praises!"

"We went down by the church of St. Germain.

"If you do not think me of too low rank?" I asked.

"His answer was a thrust so straight and prompt that, without a leap, I might have fallen.

"That is my thrust," he said.

"Another little lesson," I cried.

"He poked me right on the forehead that time."

"You saw only fire, then, my little Parisian?" inquired Cocardasse.

"I saw the faint, but not the perry," answered Lagardère. "Nevers is so quick, and the watch came and parted us."

"So Nevers will always have you at advantage," cried Cocardasse.

"Not so sure," answered Lagardère.

"What! you know the secret?"

"Pardieu! I studied it well."

"Well?"

"Ou, it is nothing."

The swordsmen drew breath.

"Sir Knight," said Cocardasse, very humbly, "might I ask you the greatest favor?"

"Certainly."

"Would you show me that thrust?"

"With very great pleasure," answered the Little Parisian."

Lagardère and Cocardasse put themselves on their guard. The others made a circle round them.

"One, two, tierce, parry ; to the right ; draw back, parry ; one, two, a pass under the sword, and forward," cried Lagardère, in sharp and rigid accents.

Cocardasse jumped aside.

"I see a thousand candies!"

"And the parry?" cried they all.

"Clear as daylight," said Lagardère. "Come! tierce—draw back, prime twice—parry—foil—the trick is done!"

"Have you caught it?" cried Cocardasse to the rest, wiping his forehead. "It might serve——"

"It will serve at once," said Lagardère, and he opened his letter. "Never's promised me my revenge," he said; "I wrote to him and here is his answer. What a fine fellow he is! When I am only his match I shall love him like a brother. He agrees to meet me here, at dusk, in the trenches of Caylus."

A profound silence followed this announcement.

Passepoil put his finger on his lip.

"Why choose this place?" asked Cocardasse.

"Oh!" said Lagardère, laughing; "I heard that the old Marquis here was the best gaoler in the world; and having met his daughter Blanche at the village festival at Tarbes—by my faith! she is adorably beautiful—after my little sally with Nevers I wished to console the charming recluse."

"Have you the key of the gaol, Captain?" demanded Cocardasse.

"Oh, I shall enter somehow—by the door—by the window. It won't be the first fortress I have taken by assault. Don't you think it will be a delightful adventure?"

"Very delightful," answered Cocardasse; "but may I ask if you have spoken of the lady in your letter to Nevers?"

"Assuredly; I explained the whole matter. But how grave you all look!"

"We are thinking that it is fortunate we are here to help you."

Lagardère burst out laughing.

"You won't laugh when I tell you that it will be no pleasant trial of skill between you and Nevers—to night, but a matter of life and death. Nevers is the lady's husband."

Lagardère laughed the more.

"Bravo!" he cried; "a secret marriage—a Spanish romance! Capital! I did not expect such a splendid adventure."

"And that such a man should be outlawed!" said Passepoil, with emotion,

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOWER WINDOW.

THE night was dark. The massive towers of the castle were dimly visible in the obscurity.

"Come, sir," said Cocardasse to Lagardère, who was girding on his sword; "no false shame. Let us help you in this fight."

"Or with the lady," added Passepoil. Lagardère shook his head.

"Another glass, and then leave me to settle my own business; that is the greatest favor you can do me," he said, carelessly.

The Gascon took Lagardère aside.

"I would lay down my life for you, but we must not leave this place."

"Why?"

"Because we are waiting for some one."

"Who is it?"

"Don't be angry; that some one is Philip of Nevers."

Lagardère shuddered.

"And why are you waiting for the Duke?"

"On the part of a worthy gentleman, who——"

He had no time to finish his speech; Lagardère grasped him by the throat.

"Assassination!" cried the Parisian; "and you dare tell this to me?"

"Allow me to say one word," began Passepoil.

"Silence, fellows! I forbid you to touch a hair of his head. If Nevers dies, it shall be by my hand, and in loyal combat; not by yours, by all that's infernal, while I am alive!"

He drew himself up proudly; his voice did not tremble, but vibrated with passion.

"And was it for this that you wanted to learn Nevers' thrust?—and I—hah! It is shame only to have been in the company of such wretches."

"That is a hard word," sighed Passepoil.

Cocardasse swore in true Gascon fashion.

"Off with you!" cried Lagardère, "or, by my soul, you shall have to do with me!"

And he drew his sword. Cocardasse and Passepoil kept back the other ruffians, who, trusting in their numbers, were inclined to revolt.

"What harm is it to us," insinuated Passepoil, "if the Chevalier wants to do our work?"

They all departed, forgetting to pay for their wine; and Passepoil snatched a kiss from the girl, who asked for her money.

Lagardère was left alone. He paid for all, and desired the girl to close the house.

" Shut your shutters as close as you can," he said, " and bolt your doors. Let every creature in this house sleep as soundly as the dead themselves. Whatever you hear in the trenches yonder, keep your thoughts to yourselves. It will not concern you."

Having said this the Chevalier left the house.

" Eight against one—the wretches!" he murmured as he took the path down the trenches.

He reached the drawbridge; his eyes had become used to the darkness, and he could see the low-barred window. He was at the foot of the high wall.

" Well," he said to himself, for all his natural vivacity had returned, " what shall I say to that proud beauty? Already I can see the flash of her dark, angry eyes." He heard the sounds of footsteps approaching, and the ring of silver spurs. By the light of the dim torch at the top of the drawbridge, Lagardère could see two men, wrapped in large cloaks; they were trying in darkness to look down the trench.

" I see no one," said one, in a low voice.

" Yes, I see a man near the window," answered the other; and he called stealthily, " Cocardaise!"

No answer.

" Faenza! it is I, Master Peyrolles."

" I fancy I know that rascal," thought the Parisian.

" Staupitz, Passepoil!" cried Peyrolles again.

" The man is not one of ours," grumbled his companion.

" Impossible," answered Peyrolles. " I told them to keep watch. It is Saldague; I recognise him. Saldague!"

" Here!" answered Lagardère, imitating at hazard the Spanish accent.

" Oh, I was sure," cried Peyrolles; " let us go down the steps."

The two men descended. Peyrolles' companion was a tall man of noble aspect, and Lagardère thought he detected the Italian accent.

" Speak low," this man said, cautiously descending the steep, narrow steps.

" Useless, Prince," replied the factotum; " the rascals know well who pays them. I did my best; but they would not believe it was the Marquis of Caylus."

" A fine thing to know!" thought Lagardère: " apparently I have two precious rogues to deal with."

" You have been to the chapel?" asked the one who seemed the master.

" Yes; but I was too late," replied the other.

" Fool!" cried the master angrily.

" I did all I could, Prince. I found the register in which Don Bernard had inscribed the marriage of Blanche de Caylus with the Duke of Nevers, and also the birth of their daughter."

" Well."

" The page containing those registries

had been torn out."

Lagardère listened eagerly.

" We have been forestalled," said the master, with vexation; " but by whom? Yes, it must be Blanche. She expects to see Nevers to-night, and she wishes to give him the child and the deeds which prove its birth. Dame Martha could not tell me this, as she did not know it herself; but I guess it."

" Well, what does it matter?" said Peyrolles. " Nevers once dead—"

" Nevers dead, his estates go to his child."

There was silence for a few minutes.

" And the child?" whispered Peyrolles.

" The child will disappear," interrupted the other. " I would have avoided this extremity; but it shall not stop me. What sort of a man is Saldague?"

" A finished rogue."

" Is he to be trusted?"

" Yes, if he is well paid."

The master pondered.

" I should have wished to have trusted only to ourselves; but neither of us have Nevers' figure."

" You are too tall, and I am too thin," replied Peyrolles.

" How dark it is!" said the master. " So Saldague is, you say, about the Duke's height?"

" He is."

" Call him bither."

" Saldague?" cried Peyrolles.

" Here," answered the Parisian.

" Come forward."

Lagardère advanced. He had pulled up the collar of his cloak, and the deep brim of his hat concealed his face.

" Would you like to gain fifty crowns, besides your share of the bounty?" asked the master.

" Fifty crowns?" answered Lagardère.

" What must I do?"

Whilst speaking, he tried to make out the stranger's features ; but in vain.

"Do you guess?" said the master to Peyrolles.

"Yes ; but the password?"

"Martha gave it me : it is Nevers' device—*Adsum.*"

"Yes ; but he does not say it in Latin. He says, simply : 'I am here!'"

"You will say those words softly under that window," said the Unknown. "The shutters will open, and a woman will come forward. She will speak to you ; but you must not utter a word, but keep your fingers on your lips."

"To make it seem that we are watched. Yes ; I understand."

"The fellow is sharp," whispered the master ; and then he continued :

"The woman will give you a bundle ; you are to take it in silence, and bring it to me."

"And you are to give me fifty crowns?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm your man."

"Hush!" said Peyrolles.

They all listened. A distant noise was heard.

"Let us leave," said the master. "Where are your comrades?"

Lagardère pointed to the other side of the trenches.

"Good ! You remember the password?"

"I am here!" said Lagardère.

"Right. I shall expect you hy-and-by."

"By-and-by," repeated Lagardère, touching his hat.

Peyrolles and his companions mounted the steps. Lagardère followed them with his eyes.

"What an effort it was," he said, wiping his face, "to keep from striking those fellows ! But let's follow this adventure to the end."

The Chevalier had quite forgotten his duel and his foolish gallantry.

"What am I to do?" he thought. "Carry off the child—for the bundle must be it. But to whom can I trust it? I have no one here but these rascals. Fine guardians they would make for a young lady ! Still, I must get her, else these wretches will kill her, as they hope to murder her father."

Much agitated, he walked between the haystacks, watching the low window. Presently he heard a slight noise.

"I am here," said a sweet but trembling woman's voice.

"I am here," answered Lagardère.

"Thank Heaven!" replied the voice from the window.

The shutters were thrown open. The night was very dark ; but the Parisian could still recognize Blanche pale and trembling, though still beautiful, leaning out of the window.

Had anyone reminded Lagardère that he wished to enter that lady's chamber, he would have given a positive denial. Perhaps at that moment there awoke in him another and a better life.

Blanchefl looked around.

"I see nothing," she murmured. "Where are you, Philip?"

Lagardère held out his hand, which she pressed to her heart.

Lagardère shuddered, and tears arose to his eyes.

"Philip, Philip!" cried the lady, "are you sure you have not been followed ? I fear that we are betrayed!"

"Take courage, madam," muttered the Parisian.

"Is that you, Philip?" she cried. "Good Heavens ! am I mad ? I no longer know your voice!"

She held the bundle that Peyrolles and his friend had mentioned.

"I have much to tell you ; but where to begin——"

"There is not time," murmured Lagardère, ashamed to trespass on her confidence ; "we must make haste, madam."

"Why that cold tone ? Why don't you call me Blanche ? Are you angry with me?"

"Quick ! quick Blanche!"

"I obey, my dearest Philip. Hero is our little darling ; she is no longer safe with me. My letter told you there is treachery around us."

She held out the child, wrapped up in a silk mantle.

Lagardère took it in silence.

"Oh, let me embrace her once more!" cried the poor mother, bursting into tears.

"Oh, when shall I see her again?"

Her voice was almost choked by her sobs.

Lagardère perceived that she was holding to him something white.

"What is this?"

"Oh, you know ; but you are as troubled as I am. These are the pages torn from the registry in the chapel. All our child's future depends on their safe preservation."

Lagardère took the papers in silence ; he feared to speak.

At that moment the plaintive sound of a horn was heard at a distance.

"That must be a signal!" cried Blanche. "Save yourself—save yourself, Philip!"

"Farewell!" cried Lagardère, playing his part to the last, not to break the poor mother's heart. "Fear nothing; your child is safe!"

She drew his hand towards her and kissed it—then closed the shutters and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

LAGARDÈRE'S VOW.

The horn was a signal.

The Duke of Nevers was approaching the castle of Caylus, recalled by an entreaty letter from his young wife, and also by the insolent message of Lagardère.

On the road by which the Duke traveled there were many places where a murder might be committed with impunity; but Philip of Gonzagues wished that the assassination of his kinsman should pass as an act of vengeance on the part of the Lord of Caylus.

So here is the noble Lagardère—the incorrigible duellist, the first swordsman in France, as wild and reckless as he is brave—with a little girl of two years old in his arms.

He was, one may be sure, rather embarrassed: he carried the child awkwardly, and hushed it in his strong arms as best he could. His only fear was to awaken the little thing.

"Hushaby, pretty one—hushaby!" he said, smiling, though with tears in his eyes.

His old comrades, the troopers, could never have guessed what this terrible fighter was about on his way to exile. He was engrossed in his office of nurse.

He looked at the little Blanche, but was afraid of kissing her. The infant was a pretty little creature, white and pink, with long, dark eyelashes, like its mother's; a sweet, sleeping angel. Lagardère felt its soft breath, as it calmly rested on his arm.

"Poor babe! she sleeps," he murmured, "while her mother weeps for her father, perhaps. Ah, what a change it has made in me! That hairbrained Lagardère has been entrusted with a young child! Well

—well, he will have now to protect it. How sweetly it sleeps! I wonder what those little creatures dream? And then there is a soul in that lovely casket—a woman's soul, that will one day charm, love, and, alas, suffer. How delightful, by cherishing and tenderness, to gain the love of these little darlings—to watch the first smile—to feel the first kiss! Oh, how easy—how pleasant, to devote one's whole life to the happiness of this beautiful and innocent young creature!"

And a thousand such thoughts passed through Lagardère's brain, which many clever men would never have dreamed of, but which a mother could well understand. At last, with a sigh of deep contrition, he said:

"Alas! I never before held a child in my arms."

Another horn was heard, and Lagardère felt sure it could only be Nevers.

The Duke had left his horse at the little inn, and was approaching on foot.

"It is he!" muttered the Parisian.

The Duke was approaching, with a rapid footstep. Henri de Lagardère could see him pass the light on the bridge, and then heard him descend the steps. When Philip de Nevers reached the bottom of the trench, the Parisian heard him draw his sword.

"A torch would not be amiss," said Nevers, feeling his way among the hayricks. "Does that devil of a Lagardère want me to play at blindman's-buff?" he continued, impatiently. "Haloo! Is there anyone here?"

"I am here," answered the Parisian; "and would to Heaven I were alone!"

Nevers hastened towards the place from whence the voice came.

"To work, sir!" he said. "Let me only feel your sword, to know where you are. I have little time to spare."

The Parisian had still the child in his arms. The infant slept as soundly as in its cradle.

"Listen to me first, Nevers!" cried Henri de Lagardère.

"I defy you to make me do that, after the message you sent me this morning," answered Philip de Nevers. "I see you now; defend yourself!"

Lagardère had not even thought of drawing.

His sword, which usually jumped from the scabbard, seemed as fast asleep as the little angel in his arms.

"When I sent you that message, I did not know what I know now."

"Oh!" cried the Duke, with a mocking accent; "we don't like to fight in the dark."

He raised his weapon. Lagardère drew his sword, crying :

"Listen to me, then."

"That you may again insult Lady Blanche, I suppose?" returned the Duke, angrily.

"No, upon my honor. I want to tell you—The devil!" he continued; "take care!"

Never, in a rage, threw himself upon the Parisian, dealing thrust after thrust, with all the ardor and speed which made him so formidable an antagonist. Lagardère parried and drew back at every blow, calling out again and again :

"Only hear me—hear me!"

"No, no!" cried Never, thrusting right and left.

At last the Parisian felt himself against the wall.

"You see I can't draw back any further," he said, in an accent of distress.

"So much the better," returned the other.

"By all that's infernal!" cried Lagardère, impatiently, "must I cleave your skull, to keep you from killing your child?"

These words struck like a thunderbolt upon the Duke's ear: the sword fell from his hand.

"My child!" he cried, "in your arms!"

Lagardère had wrapped his precious charge in his cloak, and Never thought: he was using his cloak for a shield—a common practice amongst duellists. His blood ran cold when he thought of the furious thrusts he had dealt. His sword might have pierced the innocent heart of his own child.

"Chevalier," he said, "we are both fools, as well as others; but you are honorable, brave, and valiant. Had I been told that you had sold yourself to the Marquis of Caylus, I would never have believed it."

"Thanks!" said the Parisian, out of breath. "What a storm of blows!"

"Give me my child," cried Never, attempting to raise the cloak.

The Parisian pushed away his hand.

"Softly, or you will wake her."

"Tell me, at all events——"

"What a fellow it is!" exclaimed Lagardère. "Three minutes ago, he would not

let me speak; and now he wants whole histories! Embrace her, father; but gently—very gently."

Never did as he was told.

"Was there ever such a thing known?" asked Lagardère, with artless pride; "to parry an attack of Never—of Never in anger—without striking a blow, and a child asleep on one's arm!"

"In heaven's name!" entreated the Duke.

"Say, at least, that it was hard work," said Lagardère. "You wish to know how I came by this little treasure? No more kisses, papa. We are already old friends, baby and me. I would wager a hundred crowns, if I had them, that she smiles on me when she awakes!"

He wrapped the little thing in his cloak, and laid it, with all the care and tenderness of a nurse, on the hay under the bridge.

"Duke," he said, in a serious, manly tone, "whatever happens, I will defend your daughter with my life; and thus I expiate the wrong of having spoken lightly of her mother, who is a beautiful, a noble woman!"

"You will kill me!" grumbled Never. "What! have you seen Blanche?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At yonder window."

"And she gave you the child?"

"She thought she was confiding it to its father."

"I am bewildered."

"Ah, sir! strange things have come to pass. If you want fighting, Heaven knows you will have enough directly."

"An attack?" asked Never.

The Parisian stooped, and put his ear to the ground.

"I thought they were coming," he said.

"Who?"

"Assassins, who are engaged to murder you," answered Lagardère.

He then related in a few words the conversation between Peyrolles and the Unknown, his interview with Aurora, etc.

Never listened, astounded.

"Peyrolles," he said at last, "is the confidential friend of the Prince of Gonzagues—my best friend, my brother!"

"I have not the honor of knowing him," said Lagardère. "I don't know that it was he."

"Impossible!" cried Never. "Peyrolles looks a scoundrel; he may have been bought by the Marquis."

Lagardère polished his sword with the flap of his coat.

"It was not the Marquis," he said; "it was a young man. But let us not lose time in supposition. Whoever he is, he is a clever rascal. He even knew your password; so I was able to deceive Lady Blanche. Ah! she loves you well; I could have kissed the ground under her feet, to make amends for my folly. You will find a sealed packet with the child—the registry of her birth and your marriage; and that is all I have to tell you. Ah, my lady," he continued, looking at his sword, "now our toilet is over. We have committed follies enough, let us strike now for a good cause."

"Lagardère," cried Nevers, much moved, "I did not know you. You are a noble fellow."

"I?" returned the other, laughing. "Why, I can think of nothing but getting married as soon as possible, that I may have a little darling to kiss. But hush! This time I am not at fault—they are coming! Have you any one with you?"

"Only my page, Berichon."

"Will you call him?"

Nevers whistled—the page appeared on the rampart.

"Jump!" said Lagardère who caught him in his arms.

"Make haste," said the little fellow; "they are coming from above."

"I thought they were below," said Lagardère.

"Oh, they are on all sides."

"But only eight," said the Parisian.

"More than twenty," answered Berichon.

"Oh! what does it matter?" returned Lagardère. "You must take horse, and gallop with all speed to Gau, my boy, and fetch my men. Half an hour will take you there and back. Off with you. The deuce!" cried the Parisian; "we'll hold out half-an-hour, at least. Let us only make our barricades."

"Look!" exclaimed the young duke.

"Oh! that is Passepoil—a fellow who never lets his sword rust. Cocardasse is with him. Those two won't harm us."

At the bottom of the ditch, besides the hayricks, there were clumps of trees, branches, and a hay-cart. Lagardère and Nevers improvised a barricade in all haste, placing the child in the centre.

It was a poor defence; still, in the darkness, it might trouble the besiegers. While working hard at it, Nevers said—

"And you will fight for me?"

"With all my heart, Duke! A little for you, and immensely for your little girl."

"Chevalier," said Nevers, "never shall I forget this. Henceforth, we will live or die together."

Lagardère held out his hand: the Duke embraced him.

"Brother, if I live, we shall share alike; if I die—"

"You will not die," cried the Parisian. "If I die—" repeated Nevers.

"Then by my hope of heaven, I will be a father to your child!" answered Henri de Lagardère, with a solemn accent, and extending his hand to the Heaven above him as he spoke.

The two men held each other a moment in a close embrace.

"To our weapons!" cried the Parisian. "They come!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMBAT.

THERE were twenty at least.

Stampitz's party was reinforced by the smugglers of Mialhat, and a few highwaymen. Peyrolles had found his men in ambuscade, and had been much annoyed at seeing Saldague.

An explanation ensued. When Peyrolles learnt to whom he had committed himself, he was seized with terror, notwithstanding he was told of the mortal enmity between Nevers and Lagardère.

He knew by instinct that the disclosure of the meditated treachery would make them both fast friends. He sent out Stampitz, Pinto, and Saldague to recruit more bullies, and took upon himself to warn his master and to watch Aurora.

Cocardasse and Passepoil watched these arrangements with sorrow. True, they were paid murderers, whose swords were sold as much as the bully's dagger or the bandit's knife; still, they loved their Little Parisian.

The little orphan of the ruined castle of Lagardère had touched the tenderest part of their rough natures; they prided themselves on their noble pupil, and willingly would have risked their lives in his defence. To find themselves thus opposed to him grieved them sorely.

When the assault began, Passepoil said, with a sigh:

"We must do our best."

But Cocardasse answered:

"Impossible! Do as I do."

He took from his pocket the steel knob or button that he used in his school of arms, and put it on the point of his sword; Passepoil did the same. Both weapons were thus rendered useless for any deadly purpose.

The attack was made on all sides. Without the feeble barricades, Nevers and Lagardère must have succumbed at once; but the swordsmen, with their heavy armor and long swords, little expecting the obstacles that blocked up their pathway, got entangled among the hay and blocks of wood.

Two only reached our two champions, who fought close together, their backs against the wall.

These two were wounded, and the rest gave way.

Nevers and his ally now attacked in their turn. Lagardère laid a smuggler prostrate, disabled a robber, and knocked down a third.

This third man was Staupitz, who fell heavily.

Nevers, too, cut and slashed away on all sides.

"I am here! I am here!" they cried.

While fighting vigorously, Nevers saw two shadows stealing round by the bridge.

"This way, Sir Knight!" he cried.

Lagardère stopped only to give a last blow to Pinto, which cost him an ear.

"Good heavens!" cried the Little Parisian, "I had almost forgotten the sleeping angel!"

A moment's silence reigned in the ditches; a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the attack began.

"The rascals will soon be at it again, Duke!" cried Lagardère. "Are you wounded?"

"Only a scratch on the forehead."

The Parisian ground his teeth with vexation. This was the effect of his lessons in fencing.

The attack was renewed this time resolutely, and with a concentrated effort. The assailants came on in two lines, and put aside the obstacles as they advanced.

"We must stand our ground firmly," whispered Lagardère. "Only take care of yourself, Duke; leave the child to me."

A dark and silent circle with drawn swords hemmed in the Parisian and Nevers.

"I am here!" cried Lagardère, and dealt a blow.

The Matador fell, and two smugglers stumbled over him. The bullies drew back a moment.

"I am here!" cried Nevers, and brandished his weapon with irresistible force.

"Come, Saldaque—come on, Faenza!" shouted the Parisian, as the hired assassins recoiled. "Why, to reach you, one would need a spear as tall as a cathedral!"

He laid about him vigorously; already the smugglers gave way, when two men appeared at the low window—Peyrolles and his master.

"The cowardly wretches!" muttered the latter, "Are they not strong enough—ten to one? Must I take part in it too?"

"Have a care, Prince!" cried the other.

In truth, the circle became larger—the assassins gave way.

It wanted now only a few minutes to the half-hour. Lagardère had not a scratch, Nevers only the one on his forehead.

But, flushed with success, they forgot prudence, and advanced too precipitately on the assailants. Lagardère charged Joel, Faenza, Cocardasse, and Passepoil; Nevers encountered the three Spaniards.

Lagardère dealt a furious thrust at Joel and Faenza, and disabled them; then, turning quickly, he gave a violent blow on the head to the Matador, who was closing with the Duke.

The cry of "Surrender!" was raised.

"Forward!" shouted the Parisian, furiously.

"Forward!" repeated the Duke.

Everything gave way to Lagardère, who in a moment was at the other end of the ditch. But the Duke, walled in by swords, advanced more slowly. He was not a man to cry out for help; he bravely fronted his foes, and had already wounded Pinto and Saldaque.

At this moment the window opened, and two men descended into the ditch. Both held drawn swords, and the tallest had a mask over his face.

"Victory!" cried the Parisian.

Nevers answered with a cry of agony.

The man with the mask had stabbed him from behind.

Nevers fell, wounded mortally. His dying gaze was fixed on his murderer; an expression of bitter grief passed over his face.

"You—you!" he murmured, "for whom

I would have risked my life a hundred times!"

"I only took yours once," replied the other.

"He is dead!" said Gonzagues. "To the other!"

There was no need to seek the other. Lagardère, when he heard the dying cry of the Duke, rushed towards him, followed closely by Cocardasse and Passepoil. As easily could a furious lion have been stopped springing on his prey. The two ruffians rolled on the grass.

The Parisian reached Nevers, who raised himself slightly, and, with a dying voice, whispered:

"Brother, remember — avenge my death!"

"I swear by heaven!" answered the Parisian, "the assassins of this night shall all die by my hand!"

The child uttered a faint scream, as if awakened by its father's death-cry.

"On! on!" cried the man in the mask.

"You alone I do not know," said Lagardère, rising; "but I have sworn to avenge Philip of Nevers, and I must keep my oath when the time comes."

Five swordsmen and Peyrolles were between the Little Parisian and the masked man. The smugglers no longer made any resistance. The Parisian seized for a shield a trunk of hay; he leaped into the middle of the circle, and had only Saldaque and

Peyrolles between him and the man he sought. His sword, thrust between these two, inflicted a deep cut on Gonzagues head.

"You are marked for life, coward!" cried Lagardère, retreating; for he had heard the cry of the awakened child.

In three bounds he was under the bridge. The moon had now risen above the Tower.

All saw him take a bundle in his arms.

"On—on!" cried the master, in a rage. "Nevers' child must be ours at any cost!"

But the ruffians had lost heart and Cocardasse intentionally augmented their fear.

"The knave wants to finish us all!" he muttered.

To gain the steps Lagardère had only to brandish his blade. All instinctively gave way.

The gallop of a troop of horsemen was heard approaching.

Lagardère held up the child.

"Yea," he cried, turning to the marked assassin. "this is the child of Philip de Nevers! Come, dastardly wretch, and seek it at my hand—you, who planned the murder, and yourself dealt the treacherous death-blow! Whoever you are, I have marked and shall remember you. And when the time comes, if you seek not Lagardère, Lagardère swears to seek you, at the hazard of his life!"

PART SECOND

CHAPTER I.

THE GOLDEN HOUSE.

Louis XIV. had been dead two years. He had outlived his son and grandson, and the crown descended to his great-grandson—a child. The great king's will and the family council had been set aside without opposition, except some ineffectual attempts from the Duke de Maine and his legitimatized children.

The duke of Orleans, who had, like Brutus, played the buffoon during his uncle's lifetime, threw down the mask, and was declared Regent.

It was a strange epoch, on which most writers cry shame. Orgies and mammon reigned supreme.

It was the month of September, 1717, nineteen years after the events recorded in the first part of our story. The celebrated Scottish speculator, John Law, was at the height of his success and power. His bank, his Indian company, his bank-notes, all made him the real minister of finance for the kingdom of France, though Argen-
son held the office.

The Regent, whose great natural talents had been blasted, first by an effeminate education, afterwards by excesses of every kind, was the dupe of this man Law, and a firm believer in his golden dreams. At this time, the shares in the new Indian company, which were called *filles* (girls or daughters), to distinguish them from the old ones, called *mères* (mothers), were now five hundred per cent. *Petites-filles* (grand-daughters), created a little later, were held in equal repute.

In three years' time, these promissory notes were waste-paper.

We will not attempt to paint the manners of the age. If a great nation could be dishonored, this regency would have left an indeleble stain on the honor of France.

It was morning, and workmen of all kinds passed up the street St. Denis, and turned the corner of the narrow street St. Magloire, opposite the church of the same name, which at that day was surrounded by a graveyard. They entered the noble portal of the ancient castle of Lorraine, which, since the time of Louis XIII., had taken the title of Nevers, and was now often called the palace of Gonzagues, from the name of its present owner.

The Prince of Gonzagues had become, after the Regent and Law, the richest and most important man in France.

He enjoyed all Nevers' wealth, both as presumptive heir of the late Duke, and from his marriage with his widow; which marriage also brought him the immense fortune of the Marquis of Caylus, deceased.

Should the reader be surprised at this he must remember that the castle of Caylus was in an isolated place, and two young women had died there captives. Caylus the Gaoler was quite capable of using violence, and the Prince of Gonzagues was little likely to be over scrupulous.

For eighteen years the widow of Nevers had borne the Prince's name. She had never for one day quitted her weeds, even to go to the altar; on the evening of the marriage, when Gonzagues sought her room, she motioned the Prince to the door with one hand, while with the other she held a dagger pointed to her heart.

"I live," she said, "for Never's daughter; but human sacrifice has its limits. Advance one step, and I rejoin my husband!"

Gonzagues needed his wife's fortune; he bowed proudly, and retired.

Since that night, never had the Princess spoken to her husband. He was courteous, engaging, tender; she remained cold and silent.

Every day, at the hour of meal, the Prince sent his butler to tell the Princess. Each time, the first lady-in-waiting of the Princess replied that her lady was indisposed, and begged to be excused.

Gonzagues often spoke affectionately of his wife, and would have had the world believe that he lived on the best and most intimate terms with her; but no one was deceived.

Gonzagues was strong-minded, cool, calculating, and remarkably clever; his manners were tingued with the rather theatrical dignity of his country; he lied with an effrontery almost heroic, and though the most shameless libertine of the Court, his public speeches were rigidly moral.

The Regent called him his best friend, and every one applauded the efforts he made to find Nevers' child. The proofs of this child's death, had they been forthcoming, would have made Philip of Gonzagues heir to the Duke's vast wealth; but the widow of the latter, though yielding to paternal authority, had shown herself inflexible in regard to her daughter's interests. Towards the end of this summer there had been some talk of a family council to regulate these matters; but Gonzagues was so busy, and so rich besides, that he had little reason to be impatient.

All these workmen were assembled by order of Gonzagues, to make alterations in the fine old castle of Nevers, which the Duke, and afterwards Gonzagues, had spared no pains or cost to embellish. Paris, indeed, possessed not a more princely dwelling than this superb mansion, with its splendid porticos and rich marble columns; its Italian arcades and immense garden, peopled with magnificent trees and exquisite statues.

The interior vied with the outside in taste and magnificence. Gonzagues must have had strong reasons for wishing to destroy all this.

The Regent, after supper, had granted to the Prince of Carignan the right of

turning his mansion into an immense exchange, with the power of annulling the transfer of any shares elsewhere. Gonzagues was jealous; to console him, the Regent, after another supper, granted him the monopoly of the exchange of goods for shares; an astounding gift, worth heaps of gold. Space was needed for this traffic, which was to be dearly paid for, therefore an army of demolishers was set to work; statues and trees took room and paid no rent, they were, therefore, to be removed and cut down.

To those who were astounded at, or ridiculed these alterations, Gonzagues answered:

"In five years I shall have two or three millions, and can buy the Tuilleries from his Majesty Louis XV., who by that time will be ruined."

On this morning the work of devastation had been nearly completed; a triple row of wooden cages had been erected round the courtyard; the vestibules had been turned into offices, and the court was already filled with buyers and sellers, for it was the day for opening the traffic of what was already called the Golden House.

The entrance to the mansion was almost public, for the servants knew not whom to refuse. On the principal steps, surrounded by a crowd of the chief merchants, stood a gentleman clothed in velvet, silk, and lace, and dazzling with jewelery: Peyrolles, confidant, counsellor, factotum of the lord of the mansion. He did not look much older; he was still thin, stooping, hollow-eyed, yet he had his flatterers, for the Prince paid him well.

Towards nine o'clock, when the calls of hunger somewhat thinned the crowds, two men, who did not look exactly like financiers, entered the great gate. They carried swords, those long swords which make one smell the bully three miles off. But bulwicks were out of fashion now, the Regent discouraged them; so the great were content to kill each other by knavery.

Our two swordsmen mingled in the crowd: the one elbowing his way, the other creeping along stealthily like a cat.

The first wore a Spanish hat pulled over his eyes, a buff coat ragged at the elbows, and trousers of which it would be difficult to divine the primitive color: he came from Madrid.

The other, humble and timid, had a hat without a brim, shaped like an extinguisher, an old doublet, leggings mended in all

parts, and large slouching boots; his sword, as bumble as himself, knocked against his heels.

Both having traversed the court, found themselves together at the vestibule opposite.

Each eyed the other with a sneer, and thought—

"This fellow does not look as if he could buy the Golden House!"

CHAPTER II.

TWO GHOSTS.

THEY were both right.

"What a miserable-looking fellow!" said one, aside. "The poor wretch is evidently on his last legs."

"It is pitiable to see a swordsman in such a state. I at least keep up appearances," muttered the other to himself with a self-satisfied air.

"At all events I don't excite pity," added the first.

An insolent-looking footman came forward. Both our friends thought, "That unlucky fellow won't get in."

"What do you want?" said the footman.

"I come to buy you up, fool!" said the first, glancing at his own sword.

"Buy what?" inquired the servant.

"What I choose, knave! I am a friend of your master, with plenty of money."

He took the man by the ear, turned him round, and entered.

The man made a pirouette, and faced round to the other, who took off his extinguisher with great politeness.

"My friend, I am a friend of the Prince. I come on business—financial business."

The footman let him pass.

The first had entered a splendid saloon, and, looking around disdainfully, said:

"Not bad."

The other echoed:

"The Prince is well lodged here."

The two again met at the end of the room, and both laughed derisively at the other being admitted.

"Perhaps," thought one, "this knave may have killed some revenue officer, and have his pockets full. I'll get into conversation with him."

"Who knows?" reflected the other; "this fellow may have done a stroke of work last night, and have lined that greasy

doublet with crowns. I should like to make his acquaintance."

"Sir!" cried the first, with a stiff salute.

"Sir!" cried the other, bowing to the ground.

The sound of each voice struck the other.

The Breton accent, the Norman twang, betrayed the two men to each other.

"By Jove!" cried one, "it must be that knave Passepoil!"

"Cocardasse Junior!" cried the Norman, with tears in his eyes.

"Flesh and bones, my dear fellow!" cried the Breton, with a fierce embrace.

"After nineteen years!" blubbered out Passepoil.

"Ah, nineteen years!" rejoined Cocardasse. "We were both young then."

"The time of love," sighed Passepoil. "But my heart has not become cold."

"And I love a tankard as well as ever."

"Frankly, Master Cocardasse," said Passepoil, "years have not improved you."

"And they have made you uglier than ever, my old Passepoil," rejoined Cocardasse.

Brother Passepoil, with a proud smile, murmured:

"That is not the ladies' opinion."

"What the devil became of you, my fine fellow, after—"

"That affair in the trenches of Caylus?" whispered Passepoil. "Don't speak of it. I have always before my eyes the fierce looks of our Little Parisian."

"Ah! thought it was dark, how his eyes glared! How he fought!"

"Eight killed in the trench, without counting the wounded!"

"Ah! that was a sight! And when I think, if we had only stood out like men, thrown the gold at Peyrolles' head, and took part with our little Parisian, never would not have been killed, and we should have made our fortune."

"Ah!" cried Passepoil, with a sigh, "that's what we ought to have done."

"What's done can't be undone," rejoined Cocardasse. "I don't know how it may have fared with you, but it brought me no luck. When Lagardère's knaves charged us with their carbines, I made my way into the castle; but you had disappeared. Instead of keeping his promise, that fellow Peyrolles dismissed us the next morning. We left: I passed the frontier, seeking you on my way. I went to Pamplona, then to

to Madrid, Toledo, Castile—always somehow, got the police at my heels. Went to Valence—thunder and lightning! they sell good wine there!—I made my way to Tarragona, Barcasons, where I found nothing but empty purses and long swords. Well, I repassed the Pyrenees—not a maledict left to bless myself with!" And he turned his pocket inside out. "And you, friend?"

"I," said the Norman, "took refuge at Bagnères, and had a mind to visit Spain, too, only a monk took me into his service. He was going to Kehl, on the Rhine, to claim some property. I relieved him of his trunk and—his money. I went to Germany. Ah! what a country. You talk of Spanish swords—they fight there with tankards! The wife of an innkeeper relieved me of the monk's ducats; she was charming and fell in love with me. Ah! my dear fellow, what a thing it is to be such a favorite with the fair sex! Ah! if it had not been for them, I might have bought a country-house, a garden, a meadow, and a mill. The tender passion is the torment of one's life, and binders a fellow from putting up his superfluous cash. Well I went to Frankfort, Vienna, Berlin, and then I turned homesick, as well as you; and here I am."

"France—no place like France!" cried Cocardasse.

"Noble country—mother of loves!" returned the other.

"And a glorious country for wine!"

"Was it only poverty that brought you back?" asked Passepoil.

"And was it the love of home alone that made you return?" rejoined his friend.

"One night, at the corner of a street in Barcelona, I met—you know who."

"I guess," answered Passepoil. "The same reason made me quit Brussels. Have you heard," he continued, timidly, "the sad fate of our comrades in the trenches of Orylus?"

"I have," returned Cocardasse. "Stau-pitz died under the walls of his own manor at Nuremburg; Lorraine at Naples—both wounded in the forehead."

"And Pinto had settled at Turin; Matador had opened a school of arms in Scotland. One died at Turin, the other at Glasgow, by the sword."

"Ah! Never a thrust again—that dreadful thrust!" And they both were silent.

After a time, Cocardasse said:

"Faenza and Saldague still remain.

Gonzagues did a great deal for them. Faenza is made a knight, Saldague a baron. Their turn will come, and then, a little later perhaps, ours."

Passepoil sighed heavily.

"And when," continued his friend, "he has brought me to the ground with that thrust between the eyebrows, I shall only say, 'your hand, old fellow—forgive old Cocardasse."

"And I," said Passepoil, "shall ask his forgiveness, only a little sooner."

"In the meantime, he is exiled from France; so that we are sure not to find him in Paris."

"Sure!" repeated the Norman, only half-convinced.

"Well, it is the most likely place to avoid him; that is the reason I am here."

"And I also, as well as to recall myself to the Duke of Gonzague's recollection."

"Saldague and Faenza will help us on, till we get made noble like themselves. A brave pair of gallants we should make."

The Gascon laughed; the Norman answered seriously:

"Full dress becomes me very well."

"When I went to see Faenza, I was told he was not visible."

"And when I called on Saldague, a big fellow eyed me, and said, 'The Baron does not see company!'"

"Oh," said Cocardasse, "how I should like a big footman!"

"And I a housekeeper," added his friend.

"Have you seen Peyrolles? They say he is worth thousands."

"Well, I am not proud—I would become a financier, if they like."

"Sad falling off; but if one could make a fortune by it—"

"Have you heard of the Hunchback of Quincampoix?"

"What! he who lends his back to serve as a writing-desk for the endorsers of shares? They say he has gained by it in two years twenty thousand pounds."

"Not possible," cried the Gascon laughing.

"It is a fact; and he is going to marry a Countess."

"Twenty thousand for a hunch only!" exclaimed Cocardasse, surveying himself from head to foot. "I wish I had not such an elegant figure."

"Ah, my friend, we have lost our time sadly. But we have arrived here at last at a lucky moment. Paris is a very gold-

mine. Coming here, I saw some brats playing at toes-penny with crowns."

"Well, what price would a good thrust, effectually done, fetch now?"

"Not so loud—somebody is coming! My notion is, that it will fetch a good price still. And that is what I hope to learn this very hour from the Prince of Gonzague himself."

CHAPTER III.

THE AUCTION.

The saloon where our Norman and Gascon talked so quietly was situated in the centre of the principal building. The windows, hung with heavy Flanders tapestry, looked on to a narrow strip of grass, enclosed by trellis-work, which was henceforth to be called the private garden of the Princess. Workmen had not yet invaded this apartment, which alone retained its primitive state.

Its rich, massive furniture suited well the state-room of a palace. It looked more like a council-chamber than a ball-room; for opposite the immense black marble chimney-piece was raised a platform, covered with a Turkey carpet. Here, in truth, had been often assembled the most illustrious members of the noble houses of Lorraine, Joyeuse, Aumale, Mayenne, Guise, Nevers, in the time when the Barons decided the fate of the kingdom. It could only have been through the general confusion that reigned around that our two bravos could have gained admittance to this chamber. But once there, they were less likely to be disturbed than elsewhere.

A large family council was to be held this very day, which was the reason that the state-room had remained hitherto untouched.

"One word more about Lagardère," said Cocardasse; "was he alone when you saw him at Brussels?"

"No," answered Passepoil. "And when you met him at Barcelona?"

"He had a beautiful young girl with him, with a face like an angel. And in Flanders?"

"There, also, he had a young girl with him, who looked more like a handsome gitana, but who was about the age the child would have been."

"Well, and the other the same. Oh, it's

not all over, depend upon it. Peyrolles and the Prince of Gonzagues won't be forgotten—their time will come."

"He who lives longest will see," said Passepoil, with a sigh.

A servant in livery entered, followed by two workmen with carpenter's foot-rules in their hands.

They were too busy to notice our friends, who hid themselves in the embrasure of the window.

"Make haste," said the servant, "four feet square everywhere."

While one workman measured, the other marked each division with a number in chalk. The first was 927.

"What the deuce are they doing that for?" said the Gascon.

"Oh, don't you know?" answered his friend; "these lines mark the partitions for offices, and the number shows that there are nearly a thousand such already in the Prince's palace."

"And what are these offices for?"

"To make gold in."

Cocardasse stared, and Passepoil tried to explain to him the magnificent grant that Philip of Orleans had made to his bosom friend.

"What?" said the Gascon; "each of those boxes worth a farm of a thousand acres? Oh, famous! Let us stick like leeches to such a worthy patron."

"Number 942," said the footman.

"Bad measure," answered the workman; "only two feet and a half!"

"That must go to a thin buyer," observed Cocardasse to his friend.

"You will send the carpenters directly the assembly is over," said the servant.

"What assembly?" muttered Passepoil.

"We must try and learn," replied Cocardasse. "When one gets to know what is going on in a family, half the work is done."

The servant and measurers had scarcely departed, when a chorus of voices cried out:

"For me!—for me! My name is down—no favor shown?"

"Silence there!—silence!" cried an imperious voice at the entrance.

"Peyrolles himself! Let us hide ourselves," said our two friends. They concealed themselves completely behind the drapery.

Peyrolles entered, followed by an anxious crowd. The Prince's factotum was sumptuously dressed, and held in his jewelled hand an embroidered handkerchief.

"Come, gentlemen, keep your distance—proper respect, if you please," he said, as he waved his cane with a haughty air.

"Oh, the knave! Is he not superb?" whispered Cocardasse.

"I am first! it is my turn!" cried a voice.

"Gentlemen," began Peyrolles. There was a deep silence. "Gentlemen, I have the honor to represent in person the Prince of Gonzagues, and I see some hats on."

All heads were uncovered instantly.

Our friends could not help admiring the factotum's cool impudence.

"Now, what I have to tell you, gentleman, is, that these offices will all be finished and entered upon to-morrow."

"Bravo!" cried all.

"This is the only room that remains. The best places are here; every other part of the house is let, except the private apartments of the Prince and Princess."

He bowed.

The chorus began again:

"My turn!—my turn!—my name is down!—I'll hold my rights! don't push so!"

"What! You ill-use a woman? Shame! shame!"

For, alas! there were women there; the grandmothers of those ladies of forbidden aspect who may be still seen haunting the exchange about two p.m. Oaths, a shrill cry, were heard on all sides.

But amidst this tumult the large doors opened.

"Gonzagues himself!" murmured the Gascon.

"A man worth a million!" added his friend.

Gonzagues entered, accompanied by two young noblemen. He was handsome still, though nearly fifty; his tall figure was supple, as in youth; his forehead un wrinkled, and his raven hair fell in heavy curls over his simple black velvet coat. His luxury resembled not that of Peyrolles; the lace on his shirt and ruffles might have cost a ransom, and the diamond collar round his neck a fortune, which only slightly showed itself under his white satin waistcoat.

The two young noblemen who accompanied him—Cuaverry, a rakish cousin of Nevers, and the young Navailles—both wore powder and patches.

Both handsome young fellows, rather effeminate-looking, who had even at this early hour stimulated their gaiety by a

cup of champagne, and who wore their silks and velvets with easy effrontery.

Navailles was about five-and-twenty; Chaverry scarcely twenty.

Both stopped to look at the crowd, and laughed heartily.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried Peyrolles, uncovering; "a little respect for the Prince."

The crowd, ready to come to blows, was silenced as if by magic, and saluted Gonzagues, who negligently returned the salute and passed on, saying only:

"Make haste, Peyrolles! I want this chamber."

"Oh, the droll creatures!" cried the little Chaverry, looking through his glass.

"Oh, the droll creatures!" echoed Navailles, with another burst of laughter.

Peyrolles approached his master.

"They are red-hot; they will pay anything now."

"Put the stalls up to auction; it will be so amazing," cried Chaverry.

"Hush!" said Gonzagues; "we are not at table, foolish boy."

But the idea pleased him, and he added:

"Well, let it be an auction. What price shall we begin with?"

"Ten pounds a month for four feet square," answered Navailles, joking.

"Fifteen pounds a week," said Chaverry.

"Say twenty pounds," said Gonzagues; "go on, Peyrolles!"

"Gentlemen," continued the latter to the crowd, "as these are the last places and the best, they will be ceded to the highest bidder. Number 927, twenty pounds."

A low murmur, but no one bid.

"In faith, cousin," cried Chaverry, "I will give you a lift. Twenty-one!"

"Twenty-two!" cried Navailles, not to be outdone.

"Twenty-three!" cried a stifled voice from the crowd.

"Gone!" cried Peyrolles, hastily.

Gonzagues gave him a fierce look.

Peyrolles was narrow-minded; he feared to touch the depth of human folly,

"Number 928," he continued.

"Thirty pounds!" said Gonzagues, negligently.

"But it is just like the other," objected a seller of second-hand clothes, whose niece had just married a Count, with a dowry of twenty thousand gained in the street called Quincampoix.

"I take it," said an apothecary.

"I'll give thirty-five!" cried a tinman.

"Thirty-eight! — forty! — forty-five! — fifty!"

"Gone!" said Peyrolles. "929, sixty pounds," having consulted Gonzagues' face; "going for sixty pounds!"

"Four feet square!" muttered Passepoil bewildered.

"Two-thirds of a grave!" added Cocardasse.

The auction went on, the fever of bidding rose to its height. Number 929 was contended for as if it had been a fortune; and when Gonzagues put the following number at a hundred pounds, no one was astonished.

One of Peyrolles' secretaries received the money, paid at once in gold or banknotes; the other entered the names of the purchasers.

Navailles and Chaverny no longer laughed, they were lost in admiration.

"What incredible folly!" said the little Marquis of Chaverny.

"Incredible if one did not see it," rejoined Navailles.

Gonzagues added, with a sneering laugh:

"Ah, France is a splendid country. But enough of this. All the others at two hundred!"

"It is dirt cheap," cried Chaverny.

"I bid for it—I bid!" cried twenty voices in the crowd. Men fought; women fell down fainting; but still crying: "I bid! I bid!"

Then arose cries of anger and of joy; gold pieces rolled down the steps of the platform, which served as a counter.

It was astounding to see with what alacrity the pockets and purses were emptied. Those who had got their receipts brandished them above their heads in triumph.

Peyrolles and his functionaries were at their wit's end.

And, by the time the last places were put up, blood was sprinkled on the floor. At last, Number 942, only two feet and a half square, was knocked down for five hundred, and shutting his pocket-book, Peyrolles called out:

"Gentlemen, the auction is over."

"Gentlemen," cried the little Marquis, gravely, "this is not selling, but giving."

Gonzagues beckoned Peyrolles towards him.

"Clear the room," he said.

But at this moment another crowd appeared at the doors.

A crowd of courtiers, revenue officers and gentlemen, came to pay their respects to the Prince of Gonzagues. They stopped, finding the room crowded.

"Come in, gentlemen," cried the Prince.

"We are going to send away these people."

"Come in," added Chaverny; "these good folks will sell you their purchases at a hundred per cent."

"They would be very stupid, then," returned Navailles. "Good morning, Oriol."

Oriol was a young financier of much promise; Albert and Taranne were the same. The Baron de Batz was an honest German, who had come to Paris to ruin himself. The Viscount La Fare, Montaubert, Noë, and Gironne, were all fashionable rakes, distant connections of Nevers, who had been invited by Gonzagues to assist at the family council.

"And this sale?" asked Oriol.

"Not successful," answered Gonzagues, coldly.

"You, Prince, unskillful in business? Impossible!" cried Oriol.

"Well, you shall judge; I have sold my last offices, one with the other, at a hundred and fifty."

"For a year?"

"No, for a week."

The new-comers were confounded.

"Madness!"

"Yes; a perfect frenzy!"

"Cousin," interrupted Chaverny, "I'll let you my kennel for the daytime."

"When it came to the last few, the fever rose to its height," continued Gonzagues; "and now I have nothing left but my dog's kennel."

"Oh, cousin, give these gentlemen the pleasure of one more lot."

The group of courtiers burst out laughing, but the buyers took the matter seriously.

"I'll lay a wager," cried the Prince, "I will make those good people buy my kennel at five hundred pounds!"

The laughing became vociferous.

"Five hundred!" cried all the bidders.

A strange figure suddenly presented itself between Chaverny and Navailles, and a shrill, cracked voice cried out:

"I bid for the kennel!"

It was the Little Hunchback.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUNCHBACK.

He must have been a clever hunchback, notwithstanding his present folly. He had an intelligent eye, and a well-formed forehead under his grotesque wig; and a mocking, malicious smile played around his mouth. His bump was very large, and his legs dreadfully crushed, though not so thin as is usual with deformed people. He wore a suit of black, with muslin shirt-front, and ruffles of remarkable whiteness.

All eyes were fixed upon him, which disturbed him not the least.

"Bravo! bravo, Monsieur *Aesop*!" cried Chaverny. "You are a bold speculator."

"Bold? we shall see!"

His sharp voice tingled like a child's rat-tle.

Everyone cried:

"Bravo, *Aesop*!"

Cocardasse and Passepoil were no longer astonished at anything.

"Have we ever known a hunchback?" whispered the one.

"Not that I remember," returned the other.

"Yet I could almost lay a wager of all I possess, that I have seen those eyes somewhere," said Cocardasse.

Gonzagues looked at the hunchback with fixed attention.

"Friend," he said, "the money is required to be paid at once, you know?"

"I know," replied *Aesop*. The hunchback was not offended by this nickname, and henceforth he had no other name.

Chaverny was his godfather.

Aesop took out his pocket-book, and paid Peyrolles; and having waited for his receipt, bowed to the company and retired.

Everyone made way for him, and though the laughing continued, a shudder passed through the crowd.

Gonzagues looked serious.

Peyrolles and his assistants busied themselves in dispersing the crowd of buyers.

"Gentlemen," said Gonzagues, "while this room is set in order, I pray you to follow me into my private chamber."

"Come," said Cocardasse, "now or never."

"I am afraid," murmured Passepoil.

"Even I will go first," returned his companion.

He advanced towards Gonzagues, hat in hand, dragging Passepoil after him.

"Famous!" cried Chaverny; "my cousin has given us sport this morning! The hunchback was fine; but this is the most splendid pair of ruffians I ever saw."

Cocardasse gave him a fierce look.

"Have they never seen two gentlemen, that they stare at us so much?" he muttered, indignantly.

"Be prudent," whispered Passepoil.

Gonzagues shuddered on perceiving them.

"What is your business?" he inquired.

Cocardasse bowed low and gracefully; Passepoil more humbly. Then Cocardasse, looking disdainfully at the richly-dressed crowd around, said, in a loud, clear voice:

"This gentleman and myself, old acquaintances of the Prince, have come to pay him our respects."

"If the Prince is busy at present, we will return at any time he may be pleased to appoint," added the fencing-master, with another profound bow.

"Peyrolles!" cried Gonzagues, "do you remember these fellows? Take them away, give them something to eat, and a new suit of clothes each, and let them await my orders."

The two friends drew back, bowing repeatedly—even sweeping the ground with their rusty hats. But when they faced the laughing crowd, Cocardasse put on his hat, and walked majestically behind Peyrolles, Passepoil following, and imitating him as he best might.

The gentlemen who remained with Gonzagues—nobles who were nearly ruined, financiers, who had compromised their honor—were all bound to him in various ways. The Prince was their lord and king; the sequel of this story will show to what use he intended to put his influence over them.

Chaverny, too light-headed to speculate, too careless to soil himself, was the only one who retained any degree of independence.

"One hears of the mines of Peru, but the Prince's mansion would buy them all," said Oriol, a stout financier, with a red, fat face. This Oriol was a great frequenter of the Opera-house; he had admission behind the scenes, where the young ladies of the ballet consented to make game of him good-naturedly, when he was in funds, and in a generous humor.

"By Jove!" answered Taranne, a thin, insipid looking stockbroker, "this is El Dorado!"

"The house of gold or rather diamonds," added Montaubert.

"Yes!" cried the Baron Batz; "why a noble lord might live a year on one week of the Prince's revenue."

"Yes, because the Prince Gonzagues is king over great lords," said Oriol.

"Pray, cousin," cried Chaverny, "stop this enthusiasm, or it will last till to-morrow."

"Gentlemen," began Gonzagues, without noticing the little Marquis, "you know that I have your company to-day, not only to be present at a family council, but also at a solemn assembly, where the Prince Regent will be represented by three members of the privy council."

"What?" cried Chaverny, "is the succession to the throne to be decided?"

"Marquis," said the Prince drily, "we are talking seriously. Now is the time, gentlemen, to prove to me your devotion."

"We are ready!" they all cried.

The Prince bowed.

"I have summoned you, Navailles, Gironne, Chaverny, Montaubert, Choisy, as relations of the late Duke of Nevers; you, Oriol, as man of business of our cousin of Chatillon; you, Taranne and Albert, as proxies for the two Chatillons."

"Oh! then, if it is not the Bourbon succession, it is that of Nevers," interrupted Chaverny, "But what the deuce, cousin, can you want with Nevers' property, when you are gaining a hundred an hour?"

Gonzagues paused a moment.

"Am I alone?" he said. "Have I not all your interests to look after—your fortunes to make?"

A murmur of gratitude arose.

"You know you may count upon me," said Navailles.

"And upon me—upon me!" cried almost every member of the assembly.

"Upon me, too," said Chaverny; "only I should like to know —"

"You are too curious, cousin," answered the Prince. "Those on my side must follow my steps, whether the road be good or bad, straight or crooked. I alone am responsible."

"We only ask our illustrious cousin to show us the way," said Navailles.

"What is to be my task?" cried Chaverny, with much humility.

"Give me your vote and be silent," answered Gonzagues.

"We will rally round you," said Oriol, pompously.

"The Prince never forgets his friends," added Taranne.

Chaverny gave a mocking laugh.

"I like Taranne's devotion best," said Gonzagues; "my dear fellow, you shall have the farm of Epernay."

"Oh, Prince!" cried the financier.

"No thanks," said Gonzagues. "Gentlemen," he continued, "I have been today to the King's levee."

"What can make you get up so early, cousin?" yawned Chaverny.

"Ungrateful boy, is it for myself? Gentlemen, the King is a charming child; he knows all your names, and always asks after my good friends. The Regent was at his bedside, and after giving him his band the young King turned to me, and said, 'Good morning, Prince; I saw you and all your company yesterday. You must reallycede me Monsieur Gironne, he is such a rider; and Nocé, also—how well he looked! and the Count Saldague—what a general he would make!'"

"Thrown away," whispered Chaverny; "Saldague is not here."

"His Majesty spoke to me of you, Montaubert; you, Choisy, and of others also."

"And did his Majesty deign to notice the gallant, noble presence of Peyrolles?" asked Chaverny.

"The King forgot no one but you," said Gonzagues, drily. "Your business about the mines, Albert, is known at court; And your friend, Oriol," said the King; "do you know they tell me he is richer than I am?"

All applauded.

"But these are only words," continued Gonzagues, with a subtle smile. "Albert, your commission is signed; you, Oriol, have your patent of nobility."

"Oh, Oriol!" cried Chaverny, "now you are cousin to the King—you, who are related to the whole street St. Denis. Your arms shall be three bars of gules on a blue ground; your crest a night-cap, with the device 'Useful and sweet.'"

All laughed a little, but Oriol and Gonzagues. Oriol was born in a hatter's shop in the street St. Denis. Had Chaverny kept his witticism till after dinner, it would have been more successful.

"You are to have your pension, Navailles," continued Gonzagues, "and you your brevet, Montaubert; Nose, you have your appointment. I will tell you, Gironne, when we are alone, what you are to have."

All rejoiced, especially Gironne.

No one was forgotten.

"Come here, Marquis," said Gonzagues.
"Oh, cousin, I know my fate. All the good boys have got prizes, and I am to be put on bread and water," said Chaverny, dolorously.

"Fleury, the King's preceptor, was at the levée, and had heard of your tricks at Feuillantes."

"Alas!" cried Navailles.

"Alas!" repeated the chorus.

"And you prevented my being exiled, cousin?" said Chaverny.

"It was not a question of exile, but of the Bastille," replied the Duke, sternly.

"And you saved me from that? A thousand thanks!"

"I did more, cousin."

"More still? Must I thank you on my knees?"

"Your estate of Chancilles, which was confiscated under the late King, is restored to you."

"Oh, then I am yours, heart and soul!" cried Chaverny, holding out his hand. "If evil times come, cousin, and others leave you, depend upon it, I won't."

CHAPTER V.

THE WORK OF THE AVENGER.

The absence of Faenza and Saldague is easily explained.

The prizes being distributed, Nocé thought of his dress for riding to-morrow with the King; Oriol tried already to grub up some ancestors in the time of St. Louis. Gonzagues, truly, had not lost his time at the King's levée.

All were satisfied, except the little Marquis.

"Cousin," he said, "Bois-Rosé has persisted in refusing me a ticket for this evening's fête at the Palais Royal. He says they are all given."

"No doubt," said Oriol; "they were at ten guineas premium this morning. Bois-Rosé must have made nearly six thousand pounds, half of which goes to the good Abbé du Bois."

"I saw one ticket sold for fifty guineas," added Albert.

"I could not get one for sixty," said Taranne; "by this time they are invaluable."

"The fête will be splendid," said Gonzagues; "a true brevet of rank and fortune

to all happy enough to be there. The Regent, no doubt, had little idea of selling his invitations; but speculation is the besetting sin of our time, and I don't see why Bois-Rosé and the Abbé should not make a little profit out of these trifles."

"How full the saloons of the Regent will be to-night of courtiers and merchants!"

"Only the nobility of to-morrow," added Gonzagues, carelessly.

Chaverny touched Oriol's shoulder.

"You, who are noble to-day, won't you look down on these nobles of to-morrow."

One word of this fête, which had been set on foot by the Scotchman Law, who was to bear its enormous expenses, and who had persuaded the Duke of Orleans to lend him the state rooms and gardens of the Palais Royal.

Law had placed incredible sums in the Regent's hands to defray the expenses.

The eyes of the guests were to be dazzled by an unheard-of magnificence and display, and most especially by a wonderful ballet and fireworks. The fireworks were to represent the gigantic palace projected by Law on the Mississippi. The ballet was to represent in allegory, according to the taste of the age, Credit, as the guardian angel of France, placing her above all nations.

No more famines, nor misery, nor wars. Credit was to restore to the whole world the delights of a reconquered Paradise.

The Regent had fixed the number of guests at three thousand; Dubois had added a third more, Bois-Rosé had slyly doubled it.

"Peyrolles tells me he was offered three thousand pounds for this packet," continued Gonzagues; "but I kept them for my friends."

He took from his pocket-book a parcel of rose-colored tickets, embellished with lovely vignettes, and threw them on the table.

Many of these gentlemen had similar ones in their pockets, still all took some for themselves and friends, except Chaverny.

Oriol must have had many friends, he took so many.

Gonzagues looked on amused.

"Pray, gentlemen," he said, "be kind enough to leave two for Faenza and Saldague. I am surprised not to see them here. I am happy, friends, to have been able to procure you this little gratification, and what I require from you is, that where-

ever I go, you follow and rally round me like a battalion. Your interest it is to follow me—mine to keep your heads always above the crowd. If strange events come to pass, never seek to unravel them, or to learn the reasons of my conduct. Blind obedience I exact from you; and I give you my word of honor it shall make your fortunes!"

"We will follow you," cried Navailles.

"To the death!" added Gironne.

"Even to the infernal region!" cried Oriol, gallantly.

A cry of admiration arose in the assembly.

A beautiful young girl, with a joyful, playful smile on her face, appeared at the entrance of Gonzagues's chamber; she, no doubt, had not expected to see so large a company. She hastily let down her veil.

Gonzagues looked for a moment annoyed; but he recovered himself directly, and, going up to the beautiful unknown, took her hand and kissed it with respect.

"It is the lovely recluse," muttered Chaverny, his eyes still upon her.

"The Spanish beauty, whom the Prince hides in his villa behind the church Magloire," added Navailles.

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, "I was going to-day to introduce this dear child to you, for she is dear to me on more accounts than one; but I cannot have that pleasure yet. Await me here; I shall want you soon."

He took the young girl's hand, and retired into the inner apartment; and his bearded scholars took a holiday.

"How lovely she is!" cried Chaverny.

"An idea has just come into my head," said Oriol; "perhaps this family council is about a divorce?"

All agreed it might be possible, for all knew the complete disunion that existed between Gonzagues and his wife.

"Oh! the wily Prince," continued Taranne, "is capable of throwing off the wife, and keeping her fortune. It may be for that he wants our votes."

"But who knows anything of the young lady?" asked Gironne.

"Oh, nothing is known about her, except that Peyrolles, who never tells anything, is the slave chosen to obey her caprices; and that for the last fortnight the Prince's villa has been strictly guarded by Faenza and Saldaque."

"Oh! a mystery! Well, we must have patience; we shall know all to-day."

"Hallo, Chaverny!"

The little Marquis awoke up, as if out of a dream.

"What, Chaverny, you silent! you musing! Speak to us, if only to tell us that you have fallen head over ears in love."

"Gentlemen," answered Chaverny, "you risk your souls many times a day for a few trumpery banknotes. I would risk mine once and for ever for that lovely face!"

When Peyrolles had installed Cocardasse and Passepoil before an ample repast, he went out, and passing behind the church Magloire, entered with a private key a garden with an avenue of splendid elms.

At the end of the long avenue was a beautiful pavilion in the Greek style, with its peristyle surrounded by statues. It was a perfect gem of art. In the vestibule were several servants.

"Where is the Baron Saldaque?" asked Peyrolles.

"We have not seen the Baron since yesterday."

"And Count Faenza?"

"The Count has been away also."

"What can be the reason?" thought Peyrolles; but he only asked the servants if their lady was visible.

A lacquey soon brought him word that the lady was ready to receive him in her boudoir, and Peyrolles was ushered in.

"I have not slept a moment all last night," she cried, the moment she saw him. "I won't stop another night in the house; the street by the side of the wall is a place for cut-throats."

It was the same beautiful young girl who had appeared like an apparition in the mansion of the Prince Gonzagues, and who looked still more charming in her morning dress. Her raven tresses fell in rich luxuriance round her slender though rounded figure; her little feet were cased in satin slippers.

"Pepita," said Peyrolles, "the Prince desires to see you to-day at his palace."

"Wonderful!" cried the young girl. "What! am I to leave my prison? Am I to go out? Are you quite sure you are not dreaming, Master Peyrolles?"

She stared at him, and then made a double pirouette.

"And the Prince wishes you to go in

full dress," added the impulsive intend-
ant.

"What! I to be in full dress! I don't
believe a word you say."

"I am, nevertheless, quite in earnest;
and you must be ready in an hour. I am
to conduct you there."

"Madame Langlois! Angelique! Just-
time! How long these Frenchwomen are
coming!" she cried, impatiently.

Three Parisian lady's-maids entered.

"These two men shall not stay another
night in the house; they frighten me so,"
said Pepita.

"It is the Prince's orders," answered
the phlegmatic Peyrolles.

"Am I a slave?" cried the petulant girl.
"Did I wish to come here? If I am a
prisoner, I at least might be allowed to
choose my gaoler. Without you promise
me that those men" (she meant Faenza
and Saldagüe) "shall not return, I won't
go to the palace."

Madame Langlois drew near to Peyrolles,
and whispered a few words.

The intendant's face became livid with
fear.

"Have you seen?"

"Yes; they have just been found."

"Where?"

"Outside the gate."

"I don't choose to have whisperings in
my presence," said Pepita, haughtily.

"Pardon, lady," said Peyrolles, bumbly;
"let it suffice you to learn that you will
not see those who displease you again."

"Well, then, you may dress me," said
the young lady, who gave herself up en-
tirely to the delights of the toilet.

Never had she felt so joyous since her
arrival in this great city, of which she had
only yet seen the dark narrow streets in
a gloomy autumnal evening.

"At last!" she cried, "I shall see and
be seen, and no longer be cooped up in
this pavilion, with its high-walled melan-
choly garden."

And, quite joyful, she escaped from the
hands of her attendants, and danced round
the room like a child. Peyrolles had gone
to the end of the garden.

There, under the dark foliage, upon a
heap of dead leaves, lay two human figures
covered with their cloaks.

Peyrolles raised with a trembling hand
first one cloak, then the other.

Under one lay Faenza, under the other
Saldagüe.

Both had a mortal wound between the
eyes.

Peyrolles' teeth chattered. He let the
cloaks fall.

CHAPTER VI.

PEPITA.

THERE is a strange story current among
novelists, which may have been founded
on fact, of a princess brought up by gypsies;
but whether our beautiful Pepita was
of noble parentage or only a gipsy child,
we will not decide; but certain it is, she
had passed her life among them, wandering
through towns and villages, and dancing in
the market-places for a maravedi.

She will tell us in due time how she
came to leave her wild, free life, to take up
her abode in the Prince's villa.

Half an hour after her toilet had been
completed, we meet her in Gonzagues'
chamber, confused, notwithstanding her
boldness, at the eyes fixed upon her in the
state chamber.

"Why did not Peyrolles accompany
you?" asked Gonzagues.

"Oh, Peyrolles has taken leave of his
senses. While I was dressing, he took a
turn in the garden, and came back thunder-
struck. But you did not bring me here to
talk about Peyrolles: is it so, Prince?"
she said, caressingly.

"No!" answered Gonzagues, laughing.
He looked at her attentively.

"I have sought a long time," he thought,
"but could I find a better? She is really
like her. It is no delusion on my part."

"Well!" said Pepita, impatiently,
"shall I have to go back to my prison
again?"

"Not for long, dear child."

"Ah!" said the young girl, sadly, "must
I go back? To-day I have for the first
time just seen the corner of the town in
the sunshine. How fine it is! My soli-
tude will seem more dismal now I have
had a glimpse of this beautiful city."

"We are not at Madrid," objected Gon-
zagues; "we must be cautious."

"But why? what harm have I done?
Oh, I was so happy at Madrid! when I
danced on the Plaza Santa all the people
crowded round and applauded me. Oh! I
see in my dreams those splendid orange-

trees that scented the evening air. I have lent my mandoline to many a Spanish noble.

"Oh!" she continued with tears in her eyes, "that beautiful land of perfumes and serenades! The shade of these trees are so dark and cold it makes one shudder. Do you remember the night when I first saw you, and you said, "You are too handsome to dance thus in the streets, come with me;" and I followed you willingly, for you looked and spoke so kindly, and the next day you took me away to Madrid? Such a long, tedious journey—alone in the carriage with the blinds down—I dangled already to be dancing again; but you told me always how happy I should be in Paris. And now I am so dull in that house, all alone. I who so love dancing, singing, laughing; I who cannot live without sunshine, gaiety. Prince, I will go back to Spain;" and she wept.

"Dear girl," said Gonzagues, soothingly and with a father's care, "does Peyrolles annoy you?"

"Oh! he treats me with all respect and attention. Still I am his prisoner."

"Oh! you mistake, Pepita."

"No, indeed! what cares the captive bird whether its cage is gilded? I am so unhappy here. I desire to be set free."

Gonzagues only smiled.

"Why hide me from all eyes? You are not in love with me, therefore you cannot be jealous. Once I thought—when you told me you were not married, and you gave me so many masters to teach me all those accomplishments that French ladies know—I thought perhaps you had fallen in love with me, and wanted to make me your wife; and I worked so hard, I learned so fast, with the hope of making myself more worthy. But, Prince, if you do not love me, why keep me here?"

"I wish to make you happy, child."

"Give me my freedom, then, I only ask for that! And this Paris that you promised me; of what use are my fine dresses if I am mewed up in a cage? Show me the opera, take me to fêtes, dances, and to all the grand places in this splendid city, and I shall be as happy as the day is long!" and she laughed.

"This evening," answered Gonzagues, "you shall put on your richest apparel, and I will take you to the Regent's ball."

"Is that true?" she said, in doubt.

"On my honor I will," replied the Prince.

"Oh, thanks! thanks!" she cried, enchanted; "how kind you are!" and she kissed the Duke's hand, and then danced about the room. "How shall I dress?"

"In court balls," said Gonzagues, seriously, "to adorn a beautiful face, one thing is needed more even than dress."

"What is that?" cried Donna Cruz, impatiently, "and will you give it me?"

"It is a name; and fortunately, dear child, I can give you one. Your name is one of the most illustrious in France. Your father was a duke."

"Then he is dead?"

Gonzagues bent his head.

"And my mother?"

"Oh! my mother lives, then! Pray tell me of my mother," cried the girl, with emotion.

Gonzagues put his finger on his lips.

"Not yet," he said.

The girl seized his hands.

"You shall talk of my mother," she cried, resolutely, "you must tell me! I know she is good, she is beautiful. Yes, yes, I always dreamed I was the daughter of a princess."

Gonzagues smiled.

"Oh, I have seen my mother in my dreams! She had beautiful black hair, and such a sweet smile, and a pearl necklace, and diamond ear-rings. What is her name?"

"I cannot tell it you yet, Pepita."

"Why not?"

"Because there is danger."

"Oh! you need not fear," she said proudly, "I would have kept the secret."

"I do not doubt it, dear child. But you will not have to wait long. In a few hours I hope to make known your mother; now, I can only tell you that your name is not Pepita."

"Then my real name is Flora?"

"No; you received in your cradle your mother's name, which is Blanche."

"Blanche!" she cried; "how very strange!"

"How so?"

"Because it is not a common name, and reminds me of——"

"Of what?" asked the Duke, anxiously.

"Of poor little Blanche. How good—how pretty she was! How I loved her!"

"You have known a young girl named Blanche perhaps?" said Gonzagues, with affected indifference.

"Yes."

"How old was she?"

"Her age was the same as mine; we were children together. We loved each other so much, though she was well off and I was poor."

"How long ago did all this occur?"

"Some years," answered Pepita.
"But you are interested, Prince?"

Gonzagues was seldom taken unawares. He took Pepita's hand, and answered, kindly:

"I am interested in everything you love, my child. Tell me about this little Aurora."

CHAPTER VII.

GONZAGUES.

GONZAGUES was a man of letters, well versed in the literature of Athens and of Rome, a subtle theologian when he chose, and a deep philosopher.

Had he been a man of honor, nothing within human compass would have been too great for him. But he was wanting in rectitude; and without that anchor of the soul, his superior abilities only made him deviate still more from the right path.

Gonzagues was handsome, well-born, rich, brave, eloquent; his diplomatic talents were highly appreciated at Court and in the world, and every one recognised the charm of his manners and conversation.

But he knew no other law than his own will; and already the demon of the Past tyrannised over the Present. To conceal his former crimes, he was drawn into new ones. Nothing stopped him.

After five-and-twenty years his vigor was unabated.

He was great in evil, as he might have been in good.

He had chosen Pepita as an instrument that he could easily fashion to his will. After deep research, he had fixed upon her, because she was without family or friends, was of the right age, and also possessed a style of beauty sufficiently resembling the family type for strangers to find in it a family likeness.

Hearing Pepita speak of a young girl named Blanche, had moved the Duke so strangely that, stoic as he was, he could not hide his emotion from her; and taking advantage of a noise that arose from the

garden, he went to the window to calm himself.

The window looked on to the Princess's apartments, where the windows were all closed and the curtains drawn.

Gonzagues thought he recognised in the crowd the Little Hunchback, holding a prayer-book in his hand.

One of the Princess's ladies came to him; he gave her the book, spoke a few words, and retired, while she re-entered the apartments of the Princess.

Gonzagues returned to Pepita.

"What were we talking about, dear child?" he asked carelessly.

"What! have you forgotten so soon?" she answered, maliciously.

"It was about a young girl whom you loved, called Blanche,"

"A beautiful young girl—an orphan like myself."

"Indeed! and you knew her at Madrid?"

"Yes! but she was French."

"And who took care of her?"

"An old woman."

"And who compensated this old woman for her trouble?"

"A French gentleman."

"Young or old?"

"Young and handsome. But why do you talk of these things, Prince? You know neither the young girl nor the gentleman. What makes you so curious?"

"I am not curious, my child," answered the Duke; "but I have good reasons for my questions. What was the gentleman's name?"

"I have forgotten."

"Try and remember?"

"It is useless; I cannot remember," said Pepita, resolutely.

"I am sorry," said Gonzagues; "for a French gentleman living in Spain is probably an exile. Unfortunately there are many such. You have no companion of your own age, and this young girl is your friend. I have credit at Court; I might obtain the gentleman's pardon; he would bring the young girl back to France, and my dear child would no longer be alone."

There was such an accent of truth with these words, that Pepita was deeply moved.

"Oh! how good you are!" she cried. "I should like it of all things; but there is no need to have the gentleman's name, nor to write to Spain, for I have seen my friend in this city."

"When?"

"Oh! the day I came to Paris. I was disputing with Master Peyrolles, who would keep the carriage blinds down, and prevented me from seeing the Palais Royal. At the corner of a court, where the carriage nearly touched the houses, I heard singing, and recognized the voice. I broke my fan over Master Peyrolles' head, and succeeded in lifting the curtain. I saw my little Blanch sitting at a lower window; I screamed and wanted to get out of the carriage; I struggled with Peyrolles, but—"

"And the street was near the Palais Royal," interrupted Gonzagues.

"Oh! I asked the name; it is called the Rue Du Chantre; but what are you writing there?"

"Only what is necessary to be written, in order that you may see your friend again," answered the Duke; "and now, my dear child, I must leave you for awhile. In half an hour, at the furthest, you shall see your mother."

"What can I say?" said Pepita, with emotion.

Gonzagues raised a curtain, behind which was a boudoir.

"Enter there," he said.

"Yes," murmured the young girl, "and I will pray for my mother."

Gonzagues remained alone, wrapped in thought.

"Is she alone, or has he had the audacity to follow her?" he murmured. "We must learn this at once."

He rang, then called Peyrolles, but there was no answer.

The Duke hastily entered the adjoining library, where Peyrolles usually awaited his master's orders.

He found a note containing these words:

"I have much to tell you. Strange things have happened at the pavilion. The Cardinal Bissy is with the Princess. I am on the watch."

"They will all tell her," meditated the Duke, "that she must attend the council in her own interests, or that of her child, if that child lives. She will refuse; she will not come—then she dies! How proud she was—how superbly beautiful! as gentle as an angel, yet with the firmness of a warrior. The only woman I could have loved, if I could but have loved one."

A sneer passed over his face.

"Well, every one for himself," he cried. "Is it my fault if, to gain a certain height, I must tread upon heads and hearts? And

this little girl, with her head full of jewels, and fetes—how easy to make her believe her mother was a princess—a little gipsy girl! If her true mother, some honest peasant woman, were to come forward, the chit would not own her. Well, it is all a play."

Philip de Gonzagues poured out a glass of wine and drank it, then seated himself before his papers.

"Come, Philip—now, or never! Let us throw a veil over the past. The treasures of Law's bank, like the golden sequins in the 'Thousand and One Nights,' may turn into dry leaves; but the immense domains of Nevers—those are solid worth."

He paused for a moment, and put his notes in order.

"It is of no use deceiving oneself: the vengeance of the Regent would be implacable, should he ever discover the assassin of Philip of Nevers. He is fickle, forgetful; but he remembers Nevers, whom he loved like a brother. Tears came into his eyes when he saw my wife, Philip's widow, in weeds. But what have I to fear? Nineteen years have passed, and not a voice has been raised against me!"

He drew his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away some harassing thought.

"Well, I shall find the murderer; and when he is punished, it will be all over, and I shall rest in peace. I would give anything to know whether the mother has the register of the birth, or if it exists; if so, it shall be mine. I don't believe in the infallibility of a mother's instincts. If the Princess should open her arms to this little gipsy? That would be victory, indeed! Fêtes, rejoicings, welcomes to the heiress of Nevers. Then, some time afterwards, the beautiful young Princess might die, as so many young girls do. Great grief, general mourning, an archbishop to bury her. In that case, the young Princess would leave me heir to enormous wealth, and I should have well gained it."

Two o'clock struck on the great clock of Magloire.

It was the hour fixed for opening the family council.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVERS' WIDOW.

BLANCHE DE CAYLUS, widow of the Duke of Nevers, wife of the Prince Gonzagues, was seated in an apartment which, in its gravity, more resembled a chapel than a lady's sitting-room.

Its arched roof had medallions painted in the severe style of Lesueur; the tapestry that covered the walls represented subjects of Scripture, and between the windows was an altar hung in black, as if the last service celebrated there had been for the dead.

Opposite the altar was a full-length portrait of Philip of Nevers, around the frame of which was a drapery of crape.

The Princess of Gonzagues was herself dressed in deep mourning.

She had yielded to force alone in marrying the Prince, of whom she knew nothing; for, during the eighteen years that she had been his wife, she had steadfastly refused to see or listen to him.

Gonzagues had used every means to obtain an interview, but in vain. He had loved her—perhaps he loved her still, after his fashion.

Gonzagues thought so highly of his own eloquence, his power of persuasion, that he believed, that if she would only listen to him, she would have yielded to his tenderness.

But she was inflexible, and would not be consoled.

The Princess had no friend, no counselor; she stood alone in her proud sorrow. The memory of Nevers, and the passionate love of the child which she had scarcely known, were the only companions of her desolate solitude. Maternal love was the only feeling that still bound her to earth.

This morning many persons had called to pay their respects to the Princess—noble relations, who had been convened to the grand family council that was to take place to-day.

One only had been admitted to the presence of the Princess. This was the Cardinal Bissy, who came on the part of the Duke of Orleans, to assure his dear cousin that the memory of Nevers was still dear to the Regent, and that he would do anything for his widow.

To the Cardinal the Princess maintained the same reserved coldness that was habitual to her; and after all his endeavors to

excite her confidence, he quitted her with the feeling that her husband's conduct had been lenient, and even meritorious.

After the Cardinal's departure, Madeleine Giraudé, the first lady's-maid of the Princess—a widow, like herself, whose gentleness and devotion had excited some slight interest in her mistress—came forward, and placed a prayer-book, which she had concealed under her mantle, on the easy-chair near the Princess, and then stood beside her.

"Whence come you, Madeleine?"

"From my room."

The Princess, while saluting the Cardinal, had seen Madeleine among the crowd in the garden.

This was sufficient to awaken her suspicion.

Madeleine had something to say to her mistress, and lacked courage to speak it. She was tender-hearted, and felt sincere and respectful pity for this profound sorrow.

"Will the Princess permit me to say a few words to her?"

Her mistress smiled bitterly.

"Another paid to deceive me!" she thought.

She had been so often deceived.

"Speak!" she said, aloud.

"Lady," began Madeleine, "I have a child, who is very dear to me. I would give everything in the world, except my child, that you might be as happy a mother."

The Princess remained silent.

"I am very poor," continued Madeleine; "and before I came here, my little Charles often wanted food. Oh, if I could only repay you, dear lady, for all you have done for me!"

"Do you want anything, Madeleine?"

"Oh, no!" cried the lady's-maid. "It is not about myself, dear lady, but you. You are concerned in this family assembly."

"I forbid you to speak of it, Madeleine."

"Dear lady, even if you should dismiss me, at least let me do my duty. Do you not wish to find your child again?"

The Princess, trembling and pale, half rose, and let her handkerchief fall.

Madeleine stooped hastily to pick it up; as she did so, some Spanish gold pieces fell on the floor.

"You have been bribed by the Prince, who has just come from Spain," said the Princess, in a severe tone. "Leave me!"

Madeleine threw herself on her knees.

"In Heaven's name, lady, listen to me first! He who gave me the gold comes also from Spain."

"Leave me!" cried the Princess, still more imperiously. "I will hear nothing."

When Madeleine had quitted the room, the lady sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"I could have loved that woman," she murmured, with a shudder. "Oh, merciful Heaven, let me never trust in any one again! My child—my child!" she cried, bitterly. "Holy Virgin! I wish she were dead, that I might meet her again with thee. Holy Mother! must I still endure this agony? Have I not suffered this martyrdom long enough? Oh, let me die!"

Her arms fell powerless by her sides, her eyelids closed.

The Princess remained long in this dull torpor of grief, as if Heaven in mercy had granted her prayer.

After a while, she gradually revived, and stretched forth her hand towards the prayer-book that Madeleine had placed on the chair.

At one place the book opened of itself—it was at the psalm "*Miserere*," which the Princess was accustomed to repeat many times a day.

At first, her weary eyes could hardly see the words; then she started violently, and exclaimed:

"How is it possible? The book has not been moved!"

Had she seen it in Madeleine's hand, she would have known there was nothing miraculous in the matter; as it was, she believed it a miracle.

Under the words "Have pity upon me, O Lord," was written, in an unknown hand:

"Heaven will have pity, if you have faith. Have courage to defend your child. Well or ill, go to the family council. Remember Nevers' device—the signal so many years ago—I am here!"

The Princess of Nevers drew herself up proudly.

"Courage!" she cried; "I shall find courage—courage to defend and protect my child!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLEADING.

THE grand saloon, which in the morning had been dismoured by the ignoble auction, and would be pointed on the morrow by the vilest gambling, shed at this moment its last ray of splendor.

Beneath its roof were now assembled the owners of the most illustrious names in France—dukes, marquises, counts, and gentlemen without number. This august assembly divided itself naturally into two parts—those that Gonzagues had bought, and those that were free.

Among the first was a duke, a prince, many marquises and counts, and all the lesser folk: Gonzagues trusted to his eloquence to win the rest.

No one knew exactly why the meeting had been convoked.

Gonzagues had warm partisans. A few honorable old nobles, and many chivalrous young ones, took part with the Prince; but the opinion now current, since the Cardinal's visit, was that the lady was slightly deranged.

The general belief was, therefore, that she would not attend; but Gonzagues insisted that she should be waited for, which courteous forbearance made a stronger impression in his favor.

At half-past two the meeting was opened.

The president Lamoignon, was in the chair, supported by Villeroy and Argenson, royal commissioners and judges, representing the Duke of Orleans, who was prevented by state affairs from presiding in person.

The court thus instituted was to decide without appeal on all questions relative to the succession of the late Duke of Nevers, and the inheritance of his wealth and large estates. A paper to that effect was read, which was listened to in profound silence.

The question was about to be moved, as to who should stand proxy for the Princess of Gonzagues; when suddenly the large doors were thrown open, and the Princess presented herself, clad as usual, in deep mourning, but so calm and beautiful, that a murmur of admiration passed through the assembly.

No one had expected to see her, least of all, to see her thus.

"Gentlemen," said the Princess, in a

sweet, though distinct tone, "no proxy is needed; I am here!"

Gonzagues went forward instantly to meet his wife, and, with respectful gallantry, offered his hand to conduct her to her seat.

The lady did not refuse the courtesy, though his touch made her shudder and change color.

A seat on the right of the platform, close to the Cardinal Bissey, had been placed for the Princess.

Behind her was a door concealed by drapery.

The president again read the act of convocation.

Gonzagues was plunged in deep reflection. No one knew—perhaps not himself—whether he was glad or sorry at his wife's arrival.

When called upon by the president to set forth his wishes and his rights, he rose, bowed low to his wife, then to the royal commissioners, lastly to the assembly.

Gonzagues was a fine orator, and his noble presence and handsome face made a favorable impression.

"No one," he began, in an almost timid voice, "can think that I have desired to convolve such an assembly from any ordinary motives. But, before entering on a more serious subject. I must express the diffidence I feel in appearing before so many noble and illustrious persons, and express my sincere thanks to all who have so greatly honored our family. First, I would thank his highness the Regent, of whom, not being present, one may be permitted to speak openly—that noble, that illustrious prince, who is always ready to do a good, a generous action."

General applause followed this speech.

Oriol and his party clapped their hands vociferously.

"What a barrister our dear cousin would have been!" whispered Chaverny to Choisy.

"Secondly," continued Gonzagues, "I would thank the Princess, who, notwithstanding her weak health and her love of solitude, had forced herself to take part in our poor human affairs. Thirdly, I would thank the noble dignitaries—supporters of the greatest kingdom of the earth—who rule the destinies of the nation; the glorious captain whose victories will form the theme of future Plutarchs; an illustrious prince of the Church; and those nobles worthy to sit on the steps of the throne.

Lastly, I thank you all, gentlemen, of whatever rank you may be. My very soul is penetrated with gratitude, and from my heart I earnestly and sincerely thank you all."

This was said in the clear, sonorous tone peculiar to the northern Italian.

Inclining his head, after a moment's pause, Gonzagues continued, with emotion:

"Philip of Lorraine, Duke of Nevers, was by birth my cousin—in heart my brother. Our youth had been passed together—I may say, our souls were one, so entirely were our joys and our sorrows mingled. He was a noble fellow! Heaven only knows what glories might have cast a halo of splendor round his riper years. But He who holds in His hands the destinies of nations and of men, stopped the young eagle in his glorious flight. Nevers died before he had attained the age of five-and-twenty. In my life which has known much suffering, never have I felt so severe a blow. I speak here in the name of all. Nineteen years have passed since that fatal night, and yet those long years have not softened the bitterness of our regret. His memory is there," placing his hand on his heart, "living, eternal, like the weeds of that poor lady, who did not disdain to bear my name after that of Nevers."

All eyes turned on the Princess, whose color rose violently with her strong emotion.

"Speak not of that," she murmured. "Eighteen years I have passed in solitude and tears."

Those who were there to judge justly were moved at these words.

Gonzagues' partisans expressed their disapproval.

The Cardinal Bissey rose.

"I appeal to the president to command silence!" he exclaimed. "The words of the Princess should be listened to with the same respect as those of the Prince."

"Silence!" cried Lamoignon, with so much severity as to shame Gonzagues' imprudent friends.

Gonzagues continued, turning to the Cardinal:

"Not with the same, but infinitely more respect, if it be permitted me to contradict your Eminence, should the Princess, as the wife and widow of Nevers, be regarded, and I am surprised that any hero should for a moment forget the profound respect due to the Princess of Gonzagues."

Chaverny laughed to himself.

"If the devil only had saints, I would plead at Rome that my cousin might be canonised," he said to himself.

"Philip of Nevers," continued Gonzagues, "died the victim of vengeance, or of treason. I must pass over the mysteries of that fearful night. The Marquis de Caylus, the father of the Princess, has been dead many years, and respect closes my lips."

He saw that the Princess was much agitated, and added :

"If the Princess has any communication to make, I will give way."

Blanche de Caylus made a vain effort to speak.

After awaiting a few seconds, Gonzagues went on :

"The death of the Marquis—who could, no doubt, have given valuable testimony—the great distance of the place where the crime was committed, the flight of the murderers, and other reasons with which most of you are acquainted, rendered it impossible for justice to reach this dreadful deed. Suspicion rested. But, gentlemen, Nevers had another and much more powerful friend than myself. You all know him. That friend is Philip of Orleans, Regent of France. Who, then, dare say that the murdered Duke of Nevers had no avengers?"

There was a pause.

Blanche de Caylus was silent—stifled by her indignation.

The assembly whispered a general assent.

Gonzagues continued :

"I come now," he said, "to the facts which have caused this convocation. It was in marrying me that the Princess avowed her secret but legitimate marriage with the late Duke of Nevers, and also legally attested the existence of a daughter, the fruit of this secret union. Written proofs were wanting. The parochial registry of the marriage and of the birth had been torn out of the register; and the Marquis, who could alone have given the necessary information, was silent; and who can now interrogate his tomb? The only witness is the sacramental testimony of Don Bernard, who inscribed the attestation of the first marriage, and of the birth of Nevers' daughter, on the margin of the deed which gave my name to the widow of Nevers. I wish that the Princess would bear witness to the truth of what I state.'

The Cardinal leant towards her, then answered :

"The Princess contests nothing."

Gonzagues bowed, and continued :

"The child disappeared on the very night of the murder. You know, gentlemen, what an inexhaustible treasury of patience and of tenderness is a mother's heart. For eighteen years the only care, the only thought of the Princess, the employment of each day, each hour—has been to seek her child. Hitherto, her endeavours have been totally in vain. Not a sign, not a trace has been discovered."

Here Gonzagues looked towards his wife, in whose wet eyelids he sought in vain for that despair that his last words should have awakened.

The Princess's eyes were raised to Heaven.

Gonzagues continued, though not without apprehension :

"Now, gentlemen, I must speak to you, though most reluctantly, of myself. After my marriage, under the reign of the late King, and at the instigation of the Duke of Elbouf, the parliament by act suspended indefinitely my rights to the inheritance of Nevers. This was to protect the interests of the young Princess, in case she were still alive, and I was far from complaining of it. Still this act has been the cause of my deepest sorrow."

Everyone was interested.

A look from Gonzagues told Oriol and his party that the critical moment had arrived.

"I was young," continued Gonzagues, "well received at Court, already rich, and of uncontested rank. I had a wife who was in herself a treasure of beauty, wisdom, and goodness. But how to escape the bitter shafts of envy? On one point, I, like Achilles, was vulnerable. The act of parliament had placed me in a false position; for to those degraded minds who make interest the god of their idolatry, it seemed that I must desire the death of Nevers' child."

This speech was greeted with a burst of general indignation, especially from Oriol and his party.

"Oh! gentlemen, such is the world! I had interest in the death of this missing girl; therefore, perchance, must have an evil design. Calumny had a fine mark; she could fasten her most envenomed teeth in my very heart, blasting my honor by her

foul breath. I was suspected of the very worst intentions; and coldness, distrust—almost hatred—separated me from my wife. The living husband became the rival of the dead. Oh, gentlemen, if you knew the tortures, the agony the wicked can inflict!—if you knew the tears of blood that are shed, invoking God's help in vain. Oh, how willingly would I have given titles, rank, wealth, to have the happiness granted to the poorest laborer—the blessing of a devoted wife and loving children, those holiest gifts of an all-merciful Heaven!"

The last words were pronounced with such deep emotion, as to penetrate the hearts of all the assembly.

All felt not only interest, but compassion, for a man who with tears in his voice and eyes, had thus laid bare the terrible wound of his whole life.

Two only in this vast assembly remained unmoved. Those two were the Princess and Chaverry.

The former retained her air of cold indifference.

The latter muttered :

" My illustrious cousin is a most consummate rascal!"

With the rest, the coldness of the wife pleaded strongly in the husband's favor.

" It is too much," whispered Mortemart to the Cardinal.

Oriol wept.

The Baron de Batz sobbed aloud.

" What a heart!" cried Taranne.

" What a noble heart!" amended Peyrolles, who had just entered.

Gonzagues, pale with emotion, continued :

" Heaven is my witness, I bear no rancor, gentlemen, towards this poor mother. Mothers are credulous, because they love so passionately. If I have suffered, has she not also endured cruel tortures? The strongest mind is weakened by such afflictions. She was told that I was the enemy of her child—that vile interests swayed me, the richest man in France except John Law—that I had agents in France, Spain, and Italy. You were told this, madame?" he asked, turning to the Princess.

" I was told so," she answered.

" You were also told, madame," continued the Duke, " that if you sought your daughter in vain, it was my hand that secretly blasted all your efforts—is it not so?"

" I was told so."

" You perceive, my judges and peers."

said Gonzagues, " And were you not told one thing more, madame?" he said, turning once more to the Princess: " that perhaps your child no longer lived—that she had perished by my perfidious hand—that there were men vile enough to take a child's life?"

The Princess, as pale as death, again answered

" I was told so."

" And you believed it, madame?"

" I believed it," she answered, coldly.

A cry of indignation arose on all sides.

" You condemn yourself, lady," whispered the Cardinal.

The president was about to speak, when Gonzagues interrupted him.

" Allow me, monsieur," he said. " I have imposed on myself a painful duty, let me fulfil it unassisted. My chief reason for desiring to call together this august assembly, was to force the Princess to hear me once in her life. During the eighteen years that we have been married, never have I been able to obtain this favor. I wanted to gain access to her—I, her husband, whom she banished from her presence upon our wedding-day. I wanted to show myself only as I am to her who knows nothing of me. Thanks to you, I have succeeded. But do not interfere between us. I have a talisman that will open her eyes."

Then, addressing the Princess amid the general silence, Philip of Gonzagues said :

" You were told the truth, madame: I had agents in France, Spain, and Italy; and while you believed these vile accusations against me, I was working for you, exerting my influence, my wealth—working heart and soul for you. After so many years' labor, to-day I am rewarded. Ah! you listen to me now! To-day I, who still love and honor you, come to you, who despise and hate me, and say, 'Open your arms, happy mother; I have brought you your child!'"

He turned to Peyrolles, and said :

" Bring in Blanch de Nevers!"

CHAPTER X.

I AM HERE!

GONZAGUES was a most consummate actor; all were carried away with his touching eloquence.

Even Oriol and his faction whispered:

"To-morrow he may deceive, but he speaks truth now."

And some of them added:

"How can such nobleness of soul be joined to such perversity?"

The Duke's peers and judges regretted that they had doubted him. What raised him especially in their minds, was his chivalric love of his wife, his magnanimous forgiveness of his wrongs.

Every heart beat violently.

Lamoignon wiped away a tear, and Vil leroy, the old warrior, exclaimed:

"By my honor, Prince, you are a noble fellow!"

But the fullest testimony to the power of his words was the extraordinary effect they had on the Princess, and the conversion of the sceptical Chaverry.

Chaverry was hard to convince, but at the Prince's last words he remained confounded.

"If he has done that," he whispered to Choisy, "I pardon him all the rest."

The Princess rose, pale as a ghost, and trembling so violently that the Cardinal had to support her. Her eyes were fixed on the door, hope and dread passing alternately over her features.

Was it possible that she should see her child?

The mysterious warning found in her prayer-book bade her come—she had come! Should she have to defend her child?

Whatever danger there might be, joy triumphed in the mother's bosom. Her heart leaped forth to meet her child. The tears of eighteen years would be repaid with one smile. With what impatience she waited!

Peyrolles entered, leading Pepita by the hand.

"How beautiful she is!" cried the faction, unanimously. "What a family likeness!"

But disinterested members not in the secret went still further, and, gazing on her and the Princess, said:

"She is indeed like her mother!"

But the face of the Princess was again overcast with anxiety and trouble. She

regarded the beautiful young girl almost with horror.

Oh! it was not thus that she had pictured to herself her child.

Her daughter could not be more beautiful than this young girl, but she must be different. Another fear awoke in the mother's heart.

What could have been the past life of this lovely girl, whose eyes shone with such brilliancy, whose whole person showed an air of freedom which the restraints of education seldom permit a duke's daughter to obtain?

Chaverry expressed the feelings of the Princess, when he said.

"She is charming; but the name of Nevers does not fit her—it overwhelms her."

Gonzagues had not thought of this.

"Mademoiselle de Nevers," he said, "go and embrace your mother!"

Pepita's joy was not feigned.

She turned with tenderness, and made a movement towards the Princess, who by a cold gesture stopped her.

"What has become of Nevers' daughter?" she said. "Heaven is my witness, that if she comes back to me disgraced—if for a moment she has forgotten herself—I renounce her!"

"Oh, madame," cried Gonzagues, "is it thus your heart speaks? Your daughter is virtuous."

"Unless you have good reasons for doubting—" began the Cardinal.

"Reasons!" interrupted the Princess, "my heart remains cold, my eyes tearless. Are those not reasons?"

"If you have no other, I cannot in conscience, lady, combat the unanimous opinion of this assembly."

"Gentlemen," cried the Princess, "have you already passed judgment on me?"

"Reassure yourself, lady," said the president; "all here respect and love you. Act according to your conscience, and fear nothing. If in this matter you decide yourself, it is your misfortune, not your fault."

"Oh, I have been often deceived," said the lady. "My daughter ought to have the proof of her birth, the paper that the Prince spoke of—the paper which I myself tore from the registry of the chapel of Caylus."

"Your daughter shall have it, madame," said Gonzagues.

"Then she has it not!" cried the Princess.

"Take me away!" murmured Pepita, in tears.

The sorrowful voice of the poor girl struck Madame Gonzagues.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried, "let me not be guilty of the crime of thrusting my own child from me."

A voice behind the curtain whispered : "I am here!"

The Princess, overcome with emotion, leant on the Cardinal's arm.

Gonzagues took advantage of her emotion.

"Oh, madame, your good angel now prompts this relenting. Do not thrust aside the happiness offered you, after so many years of suffering so nobly borne. Forget the hand that restores this treasure to you. I seek no reward. I only ask one thing—look on your child; see, she is quite overcome by your coldness. Look at her! Is she not your daughter?"

The Princess remained silent.

The voice behind the curtain answered : "No."

"No," answered the Princess, resolutely.

She was no longer afraid; she had faith in the mysterious counsellor, for he combed Gonzagues.

He had kept the silent promise contained in the prayer-book; and he had spoken those well-remembered words which composed the Duke's Motto.

A thousand exclamations arose on all sides: the indignation of Oriol and his faction was immense.

"This is too much!" cried Gonzagues; "human patience has limits. You, madame, must give good, solid reasons for repelling evident truth."

"Aye!" cried the Cardinal, "my own words. Only, when ladies have taken a thing into their heads——"

"What reasons have you, madame?" said Gonzagues. "There are deceivers in the world. The fortune of Nevers is a fine prey. Has any other young girl been presented to you by some base schemer, who said: 'This is your real daughter, saved by me?'"

The best politicians make mistakes.

The president and other grave personages looked at Gonzagues with astonishment.

"Hide your claws, tiger!" muttered Chaverry.

"She is living, madame," cried Gonzagues between his teeth; "no doubt, you have been told so, have you not?"

"She is living!" repeated the Princess, after the voice behind the curtain. "Yes, living," she cried again, "by Heaven's help, and in spite of all your efforts."

Every member of the assembly rose in confusion.

"We have not heard all," said the Cardinal.

The voice behind the tapestry said,

"To-night at the Regent's ball, you will hear the Duke's Motto."

"And I shall see my child!" cried the Princess, nearly fainting.

Chaverry expected something and, with a woman's curiosity, slid behind the Cardinal's chair.

As he did so, the slight noise of the shutting of a door was heard; he instantly raised the curtain and opened the door.

The landing outside this door was dark, and no one was to be seen but the Little Hunchback humming a popular song with his cracked voice, while he leisurely descended the stairs.

Gonzagues meanwhile had recovered his composure, and said calmly :

"Gentlemen! decide, if you please, between the Princess and me."

"Prince," answered the president, "there is no decision to make. If Madame de Gonzagues knows where her daughter is, let her produce her. The Prince will bring forward the one he declares to be the Duke of Nevers' heiress.

"The written proof spoken of by the Prince and appealed to by the Princess, will decide the right. In the King's name and with the concurrence of my colleagues, I adjourn the council for three days."

"I accept," cried Gonzagues. "At the end of those three days I shall have the proof."

"I shall have my daughter and the paper. I accept," said the Princess.

"As to you, poor child," said the Prince to Pepita, as he confided her to Peyrolles' care, "I have done what I could. Heaven alone can turn your mother's heart."

Pepita ran to the Princess, and taking her hand and kissing it, cried,

"Madame, whether you are my mother or not, I honor and love you."

The Princess smiled, and pressed her lips to the young girl's forehead.

"You are not to blame, dear child!" she murmured gently. "I also love you."

Peyrolles dragged off Pepita.

The noble crowd had dispersed.

Gonzagues, who had accompanied the

royal judges, returned as his wife was leaving.

He approached her and kissed her hand.

"Madame," he said, "is it always to be war between us?"

"I never attack, I only defend myself," replied the Princess.

"Pray let us not discuss the matter," said Gonzagues, trying to hide under forced urbanity the rage that consumed him. "So, madame, you have mysterious protectors?"

"I have Heaven's mercy," said the Princess, "the support of mothers."

Gonzagues smiled doubtfully.

"Giraud," said the Princess, "let my sedan-chair be ready."

"Is there evening service, then, at St. Magloire?" asked the Prince, astonished.

"I know not, but I am not going there," the Princess replied, coldly; then turning to one of her female intendants, she said, "Felicité, put out my jewels."

"Your jewels, madame!" exclaimed the Prince. "Will the Court, which has regretted you so long, have at last the pleasure of seeing you?"

"I am going to the Regent's ball."

Gonzagues was stunned.

"You!" he muttered—"you!"

"I!" she replied, proudly. "My mourning is over to-day, Prince. Do what you will, I no longer fear you!"

CHAPTER XI.

A WHICH THE HUNCHBACK GETS HIMSELF INVITED TO THE BALL.

GONZAGUES paused a moment, looking after his wife, who traversed the gallery to her apartments.

"It is a resurrection!" he muttered. "I played my game well. How is it I have lost? She must have a secret I have not found out. However, we have not a moment to lose. What can she want at the Palais Royal? To speak to the Regent, perhaps. She evidently knows where her child is. And I know it too; chance favored me there."

Gonzagues touched a bell, and desired Peyrolles might be sent to him.

"She must have some fresh help. Some one must have been hidden behind the curtain," he muttered, while waiting for his confidant.

"Prince!" cried Peyrolles, coming in, "at last I can get a word with you. Going away, the Cardinal said to the royal commissioners, 'There is some mysterious crime behind all this family dissension!'"

"Never mind the Cardinal," said Gonzagues.

Pepita is in open revolt," continued Peyrolles. "She says she was made to play a wicked part. She wishes to leave Paris."

"Let Pepita be, and try to listen to me!" exclaimed the Prince, with impatience.

"Not before you hear the news. Lagardère is in Paris."

"Bah! I thought so. Since when?"

"Since yesterday, at least," replied Peyrolles. "Saldaque and Faenza are dead!" Gonzagues was evidently stunned.

The muscles of his face were convulsed; but he quickly recovered himself.

Even by the time Peyrolles raised his eyes, he had regained composure.

"Two at once!" he said. "What a devil the man is! Where were the bodies found?"

"In the little street near your villa. Both the men had been killed by Nevers' thrust. Both had received their death-wounds between the eyes!"

"Well! Lagardère writes his name twice at my door," cried the Prince, savagely. "I am glad he is in Paris. We will get him hung."

"Oh, the cord to hang him——" began Peyrolles.

"Is not spun, you were going to say. I believe it is. In faith, it is high time to look about us, friend Peyrolles. There are only four of us left."

"Yes," said the trembling factotum; "it is, indeed, time. I shudder when I think of whose turn may come next."

"Two more mouthfuls," continued Gonzagues—"we two, and the two fellows yonder."

"They are frightened enough at him."

"Then they are like you, friend," replied the Prince. "Never mind; we have no choice left. Bring them here."

Cocardasse and Passepoil had been making up for long abstinence, and had made terrible havoc in the Prince's larder; they had been dining from noon till dusk.

"Come quickly," said Peyrolles; "the Prince wants you."

The two friends had lost all their humility in their wine-cups; besides, they

were dressed afresh. They felt equal to the proudest nobility of France.

"I believe that fellow spoke to us," said Cocardasse.

"If I thought the rascal——" said Passepoil, seizing the flagon with both hands.

"Be calm, friend," answered the Gascon. "Do what you like with him, but don't break the glasses."

So saying, he took Peyrolles by the ear, and thrust him towards Passepoil, who pushed him back again to his friend.

"You forget, rascal, that you were speaking to gentleman; try to remember it in future."

"The fellows are drunk!" murmured Peyrolles, re-arranging his dress.

"I verily believe the rascal spoke again!" cried the Gascon.

"I have a faint notion he did!" returned his friend.

Both approached Peyrolles with threatening gestures. The factotum made his escape back to his master, to whom he did not tell how he had been treated.

The two friends followed him, making a great clatter with their swords.

As they stood with their hats on one side, their dress in disorder, and spotted with wine, bowing before the Prince, he looked to him severely.

"Enough!" he said.

They stood motionless.

Braves, take any treatment from the man who pays them.

"Are you firm upon your legs?" asked Gonzagues.

"I have only drunk one cup to your Highness's health," answered Cocardasse, with effrontery. "For sobriety I don't know my equal."

"He speaks truth, but I surpass him," added Passepoil, timidly. "I only took wine and water."

"Friend," said Cocardasse, with haughty severity, "you drank as much as I did; don't tell lies before me, they make me sick."

"Are your swords in good order?" asked Gonzagues.

"Better than good," said the Gascon.

"At his Highness's service," added the Norman.

"This is well!" said Gonzagues.

The Prince turned his back on the two fellows, who were making low bows, and walked to the other end of the room with Peyrolles, to whom he gave the paper on

which he had written the address given him by Pepita.

At this moment the queer face of the Hunchback appeared at the half-open door.

At the sight of the Prince and his factotum talking near the door, he drew back and listened.

He heard Peyrolles say these words:

"Street Du Chantre—a young girl named Blanche."

A frightful expression came over the Hunchback's face.

A dark fire shone in his eyes.

"You understand?" said Gonzagues.

"Yes; what a chance it is!"

"Oh, people like myself have their unlucky star!" returned the Prince.

"Where is the young girl to be taken?"

"To the pavilion, with Pepita."

"Must she simply be carried off?"

"Yes," answered the Prince; "but no noise; we must not bring curious eyes upon us just now. Address, cunning—that is your forte, Peyrolles. If blows were to be struck, I should not employ you. I would lay a wager our man lives there too."

"Lagardère!" murmured the factotum, with terror.

"You won't confront him, I know," said the Prince, scornfully. "The first thing is to learn if he is out. If he is, you are to take this card," he added, giving Peyrolles one of the two cards of invitation reserved for Saldanha and Faenza. "You will then get a beautiful ball dress, like the one I have ordered for Pepita, and go to the house."

"It is playing at toss-penny with one's life," said Peyrolles.

"Come, come! The sight alone of the dress and jewels will drive the child wild. You will only have to say: 'Lagardère sends you these, and expects you!'"

"Bad plan!" cried the cracked voice of the Hunchback. "The young girl won't come."

Peyrolles jumped back.

Gonzagues laid his hand on his sword.

"By Jove," cried Cocardasse, "there's a funny fellow!"

"Ah!" rejoined Passepoil, "if Nature had treated me so ill as to give me a hump like that man's, I should kill myself."

Peyrolles laughed, like all cowards who have been frightened.

"All up the Second!" he cried.

"That fellow again!" said Gonzagues.

"Pray do you think that in buying my

dog's kennel, you have acquired the right of haunting my house? What do you want here?" he added, turning angrily towards the intruder.

"And you, what do you want there?" asked the Hunchback, with effrontery.

Here was an enemy after Gonzagues' heart.

"Master Aesop, we will soon teach you the danger of meddling in other people's affairs," he said, quietly.

And he looked towards the two bravoes.

But at this moment the Prince's attention was caught by the extraordinary behavior of the little man, who audaciously snatched the card of invitation from Peyrolles's hand.

"What do you mean, fool?" cried Gonzagues.

"He is mad!" said Peyrolles.

"Not such a fool either," said Aesop the Second, who knelt on one knee to write.

"Read it!" he said, holding the card up triumphantly to Gonzagues.

The Prince read these words, which the Hunchback had written on the back of the card:

"DEAR CHILD:

"These adornments come from me. I wished to surprise you. Put them on. A sedan and two footmen will come to take you to the ball, where I shall await you."

"HENRI DE LAGARDÈRE."

Gonzagues was astounded.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried.

"It means that the young girl will trust that writing."

"Then you guessed our intention?"

"I guess that you wanted the girl."

"And do you know that is dangerous to guess some secrets?"

"One may make a fortune by it," said the Hunchback, rubbing his hands.

Gonzagues and Peyrolles exchanged signs.

"But the writing?" whispered Gonzagues.

"One of my little accomplishments," replied Aesop. "I warrant the counterfeit exact, when once I know a man's writing."

"And this man?"

"Oh, the man is too tall, and I am too short; I cannot counterfeit him."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"How came you to know him?"

"Business matters brought us together." "Can you give me some account of him?"

"He struck two blows yesterday. He will strike two more to-morrow."

Peyrolles shuddered from head to foot.

"There are good prisons in my cellars," said the Prince, in a threatening tone.

"Waste ground!" cried the little Hunchback, contemptuously. "Make them into offices, and let them to wine-merchants."

"I have a notion that you are a spy employed by Lagardère," said Gonzagues, suspiciously.

"A poor notion. The man in question has not a crown, and you have millions. Come, shall I deliver him up to you?"

Gonzagues opened his eyes with astonishment.

"Give me that card," said the Hunchback, pointing to the other invitation card, which Gonzagues still held.

"What will you do with it?"

"I will make good use of it; I will give it to Henri de Lagardère, and he will keep the promise that I have made in his name. He will go to the Regent's ball."

"By Jove!" cried Gonzagues, "what an infernal rascal you must be!"

"Ah!" said the Hunchback, modestly, "I am pretty well in my way; but there are greater knaves than myself in the world."

"Why this anxiety to serve me?" asked the Prince.

"Oh, it is my way when people please me."

"And I please you?"

"Greatly."

"And was it to testify your devotion that you paid six thousand crowns for my dog-kennel?"

"That was a speculation. Aesop the First made his fortune under an umbrella—I have my plan."

Gonzagues made a sign to Cocardasse and Passepoil, who came forward.

"Who are these?" asked the Hunchback.

"Some of my people, who will follow you, if I accept your services" answered the Prince.

The Hunchback bowed.

"My good friends," he said, "don't take the trouble to follow me; I don't want your company."

"But—" said Gonzagues, with a menace.

"You know the man as well as I do;

you know how blunt, even rough he is. And if he saw these fellows behind me —"

"Fellows, indeed!" cried Coquille, indignantly.

"How can one expect good manners from a Hunchback?" added Passepoil.

"I insist upon acting alone, or not at all," said Azop peremptorily.

Gonzagues and Peyrolles consulted.

"Serve me faithfully," said the Prince, looking fixedly at the Hunchback, "you shall be well rewarded. Otherwise —"

Azop bowed profoundly.

"The Prince's confidence does me honor," he said. "To-night you shall hear from me."

He again bowed, and retired.

"Quick!" said the Prince to Peyrolles; "set a watch at once over the house in the street Du Chantre, and let the rest be done as agreed upon."

The Hunchback went alone to the street Quincampoix, which was deserted at this hour.

"Funds were low," he muttered. "By Jove! if I knew how to get our cards of admission and the ball-dress!"

END OF THE SECOND PART.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE WITH TWO ENTRANCES.

At the angle of the streets St. Honoré and Du Chantre was a small, modest, clean-looking house, one entrance of which was in the street Du Chantre.

The family that for a few days only had occupied this house, had greatly excited the curiosity of the neighbors. It consisted of a handsome young man called Master Louis, a carver of sword-handles; a beautiful young girl, whose name no one knew; an old woman who never gossiped; and a lad of sixteen.

The young girl scarcely ever went out; and one might have fancied her kept prisoner, had not her fresh, sweet voice been heard singing behind the curtain that shrouded the old-fashioned casement of her chamber.

Master Louis went out very often and returned late at night.

He never on these occasions entered the street Du Chantre; for the house had another entrance by the staircase of the next house from the street St. Honoré, and he entered by that.

Since they had been there, no stranger had crossed the threshold except a little hunchback, who always entered by the staircase.

No doubt he was a particular friend of Master Louis; for he had never been seen

in the lower rooms, which were occupied by the young girl, the old woman, and the boy.

No one had ever before noticed this hunchback in the neighborhood; he therefore divided the general curiosity with the handsome and silent carver.

The house consisted of a large dining room, the young girl's bed-room, with a window looking on to the street St. Honoré, a kitchen at the back, and two small rooms—one for old Françoise Berichon, the other for her grandson, Tonio Berichon.

All this ground-floor had but one entrance up the steps from the street Du Chantre; but at the end of the dining room was a small staircase, which led up to the floor above. This upper floor consisted of two rooms; one was Master Louis' bed-room, opening on to the staircase of the next house; the other room was unoccupied, and always kept locked.

Neither old Françoise nor Tonio nor even the beautiful young girl, had ever been permitted to enter this room.

One person alone abided with Master Louis the secret of this chamber. The Hunchback had been seen to enter it; but what appeared very extraordinary was, that whenever the Hunchback entered this room, Master Louis soon quitted it, and when he entered, the Hunchback generally left.

No one had ever seen these two friends together.

On the same day that the family council life—at least, as much as she knew of it—had taken place at the Prince Gonzagues' mansion, the young girl in Master Louis' house was alone in her room.

It was a pretty chamber, with its white-curtained bed and simple furniture.

A crucifix hung on the wall, with a few bookshelves, an embroidery frame, a guitar, and a birdcage, which was suspended at the window.

A few chairs, and a round table with papers upon it—for the young girl was writing—completed the furniture of the chamber.

The last rays of the sunset fell on this young girl's face, so we shall describe her.

She was one of those laughing, joyous creatures, whose gaiety alone suffices to enliven a whole family. Each feature seemed joyous; but her dark blue eyes, with long black lashes, were thoughtful. Had it not been for this pensive look, one could hardly have fancied her of an age to love.

She was tall, almost too slender, and her movements were modest and graceful. Her general expression was sweet; still, there was a calm, proud fire in her bright eyes and pencilled eyebrows.

The black hair, with a golden tint, fell in luxuriant curls around her neck and shoulders, making a frame and a glory round her lovely face.

Some women are loved ardently for a day; others are cherished for years with calm tenderness.

She was one to be loved passionately and forever.

Her name, which the neighbors had tried in vain to discover, and Françoise and Jean Marie were forbidden to pronounce, was Blanche,

She was alone; and when the dim light no longer permitted her to write, she sat with her head on her hand, thinking, with her eyes raised to heaven.

A silent prayer gave a holy look to her face. A tear, like a dewdrop, hung on her silken eyelid, then fell over her soft cheek.

"How late he is!" she murmured.

She put together the papers scattered over the table, and locked them in a little case behind her bed.

"Farewell till to-morrow," she said, as if she were taking leave of a friend.

She closed her window, took up her guitar, and struck a few chords. To-day she had read over again all the pages in the case: they contained the history of her

feelings, her heart.

"I begin to write," she said, "of an evening, when I am alone, after waiting all day. It is the first thing I have ever done that I would not have him know. I should not like him to see these pages, wherein I speak only of him. Happy are they who have companions to whom they can confide all their joy—all their grief. I am alone: I have only him. When I see him, I am silent. What could I tell him?

"Still, I would not write if I had not the hope of being read—if not while I live, at least after my death. I think I shall die young. I do not hope it; but God keep me from fearing it. If I died, he would regret me; and I should regret him, even in heaven. But perhaps there I might know his heart. This thought would make me wish to die. He has told me that my father is dead; my mother may be living.

"Dear mother! I write for you; my heart is all his, yet it is all yours also. Have I, then, two hearts? I write for you; I will conceal nothing from you: I would like you to see the most hidden recesses of my soul. I once saw a child on its knees before a gentle, beautiful woman. The child wept, but the mother, smiling, leaned forward and kissed its hair.

"Oh, mother, what divine happiness! I fancy I feel your kiss upon my forehead. You also must be gentle and beautiful—your smile must comfort. Oh, dear mother, had I only your love and his, Heaven could grant me no greater happiness.

"Do you seek for me? Do you regret me? Do you remember me in your prayers? Do you see me in your dreams? I think so much about you, you must think of me. Should Heaven ever grant me the happiness of seeing you, my beloved mother, I will ask you if your heart never started without a motive? I will say to you:

"It was the cry of my soul that you heard, oh, my mother!

"I know that I was born in France, and that I must be about twenty. I have a vague remembrance of a sweet, angelic face that smiled upon my cradle; but whether that dear face was a dream or reality, I know not.

"Was it you, dear mother?

"I remember myself first dressed as a little boy in the Pyrenees. I led the goats to pasture. My friend was ill, and they said he would die: I called him then

my father. When I came back at nights, he bade me kneel by his bedside, and said to me, in French :

"Blanche, pray to Heaven that I may live!"

"One night a priest came to see him, and gave him the sacrament, when he said :

"Here is my poor child, who will be alone. Would it be a great crime to take her with me?"

"Kill her!" cried the priest, frightened. "my son, you are delirious."

"He shook his head, and did not answer.

"I crept up to him, and said :

"Dear father, I am not afraid to die, and be buried with you."

"He took me in his feeble arms, and said :

"To leave her alone—quite alone!"

"He went to sleep folding me in his arms. They went to take me away, but I would not let them take me from him.

"I thought :

"If he dies, I will die with him."

"After some hours he awoke.

"I was bathed in perspiration.

"I am saved!" he said; and, seeing me, he pressed me to him, and added, "Sweet little angel, you have saved me!"

"After a time we quitted this place, and went farther into the country. My friend had recovered his strength, and worked in the fields

"I learnt since, it was to feed me that he worked amongst common farm-laborers.

"We were at a rich farmer's, who also kept an inn. My friend had forbidden me to leave the little enclosure where I played with the farmer's children; but one day some noblemen arrived from France, and I followed the children to look at them. The chief called me to him, and caressed me; he whispered to another, and said :

"To horse!"

"At the same time he threw a purse of gold to the innkeeper, and said to me,

"Come to the fields, little one, and look for your father."

"I was delighted, and mounted bravely behind one of the horsemen. I sang and laughed, and was as happy as a queen. Presently I got frightened, and wished to get down; but the horseman put his hand over my mouth. Then I heard the sound of a horse behind me.

"My friend came along at a furious gallop.

"Our road led by a wood bounded by a river,—he leapt the hedge.

"I scarcely knew him; he was terrible as a thundercloud. He had the lock of a plough in his hand; he charged two of the servants, who fell bleeding.

"The man who held me turned to fly; but my friend rushed at him, and with one blow cleft him to the ground.

"I am here—I am here! Lagardère! Lagardère!" he cried.

"I know not how long the fighting lasted. When it was over, he took the horse of one of the party, and galloped away, holding me in his arms.

"We did not return to the inn. He said the master had betrayed us, and that we must hide ourselves in a town.

"We had then to hide. I had never thought of that. I asked him how it was we were obliged to hide ourselves.

"He pressed me in his arms, and said : "You shall know by-and-by."

"Then he added, sadly, 'Are you tired of calling me father ?'

"You must not be jealous, dear mother. He was everything to me—father, mother, in one. I cannot think of my childhood without tears; he was so good—so gentle. Your kisses, dear mother, could not have been more tender than his; yet he was so brave—so terrible. Oh! if you saw him, how you would love him!"

CHAPTER II.

GOLDEN DAYS.

"I HAD never lived in a town; and when we had entered Pampeluna I was delighted with the fine people we saw.

"In the mountains—at the inn—I had fresh air, the sun, the trees, and green fields; I had also companions to play with. But in the town, I was a prisoner within four walls, and alone all day; for my friend went out in the morning and returned at night, tired, and his hands black.

"He was sad; my caresses alone made him smile. We were poor, and eat dry bread; but he sometimes managed to bring me chocolate, or some other delicacy. Then he looked unhappy.

"'Blanche,' he said to me one day, 'I am Don Luis at Pampeluna; and if you are asked your name, you must say Mari-quita.'

"I only knew him by the name of Henri. Only by chance did I learn that he was the Chevalier Lagardère, and all he had done for me. He wishes, I think, to keep me ignorant of all I owe him. He is so noble, so generous, so self-denying, so brave, even to a fault. If you only saw him, dear mother, you must love him almost as much as I do."

"One evening two gentlemen came, and asked me if Don Henri lived there."

"I said, 'There is no one here but Don Luiz.'

"They said it was the person they wanted, and they would wait for him."

"Henri returned soon after, and asked angrily what they wanted."

"The elder one threw much gold on the table, then they explained that they knew him to be the valiant, the invincible Lagardère, and that they wanted a service of him, for which they would pay handsomely. That service was, that he would waylay and murder a gentleman who had insulted them."

"My friend refused the offers in such a manner as to make them gather up the gold quickly and depart."

We had dry bread alone for supper that night.

"I little knew then what renown there was in the name of Lagardère. I have heard since how he had played with the lives of men—the hearts of woman."

"It made me very sad; but I did not love him less, when I heard how much he sinned. Oh, no! he needed my prayers more; and what a change had come over him since he became my adopted father!"

"Mother, you must not think me proud, but I fancied that for me he had become gentle, wise, good; and I love to think that I have been a good element in his life."

"At Pampeluna Henri began my education."

"He was very poor, and gained little with very hard work, and his master treated him ill. And he, the impetuous, proud young man, who drew his sword for a word, a look even, bore patiently the reproaches and insults of a Spanish artisan."

"But he had a daughter."

"When he came home with a few pence, hardly gained, in his pocket, he was as happy as a king, for I smiled on him. You will smile, dear mother; but Henri de Lagardère had but one book, an old treatise on fencing. In this he taught me to read. I never had a sword in my hand, but I

know all the theory of swordsmanship. A spelling-book only came when Henri had saved up five douras to buy one. Ah! how happy I was, learning to read, setting on Henri's lap, pointing with a straw to the letters. He was so patient, so gentle; and when I had read well, he kissed me."

"Then he knelt down, and he repeated the evening prayer. He was like a tender mother with a much-loved child. He dressed me; he braided my hair; his own clothes were old, but I had always good frocks."

"Once I saw him trying to mend my petticoat!"

"Don't laugh, mother; it was Lagardère, the famous swordman, whose renown was known through Europe."

"On Sundays, when he had arranged my curls and fastened my cloak, when he had polished the brass buttons of my little bodice till they shone like gold, and had fastened the little steel cross—his first present—round my neck, he led me, smart and proud, to the church."

"He had become pious for my sake."

"After the mass, we took a walk in the country."

"How delightful the fresh air, the joyous sunshine! We wandered about; he entered into my games, and was more a child than I was. In the heat of the day, when I was tired, we hid ourselves in a wood."

"Henri sat down under a tree, and I fell asleep in his arms. He watched me the while, and beat off the flies and gnats. Sometimes I pretended to sleep, and looked at him through my half-closed eyelids. His eyes were always on me, and he smiled while he rocked me to rest. If I only shut my eyes, I can see him still—my friend, my father!"

"Do not you love him, too, sweet mother?"

"And then our dinner upon the grass!—a little black bread and some milk; but never, dear mother, were you at so joyful a feast. Such heart-felt gaiety, such caresses, such songs, such laughing! And then to play again, for he wished me to be strong and tall."

"Then, on our way home, such nice chats, interrupted now and then to gather a flower, to run after a butterfly, or to stroke a goat who bleated for a caress."

"In these conversations, these happy Sabbath holidays, he formed my mind and my heart. He read secretly, in order to

teach me. He taught me to know and love God, in all His wonders in Heaven and on earth.

" Sometimes I wanted to ask Henri about my family. I talked to him of you, dear mother, but he never answered my questions.

" He only said :

" 'Blanche, I promise you one day you shall know your mother.'

" This promise, made so long ago, will be fulfilled, I know; for Henri always tells the truth. And if I may believe my heart, the time draws near.

" Oh, mother, how I shall adore you!

" But I must go on with my story.

" He taught me long after we left Pampeluna; it was only when he became so clever in carving that every Spanish noble would pay its weight in gold for a sword-handle carved by him, that he said :

" ' My dear child shall have a good education; there are good schools at Madrid, where young ladies are taught all that a young lady ought to know.'

" ' I want you always, always,' I said.

" He smiled, and said :

" ' I have taught you all I know, my poor child.'

" Then I cried :

" ' Then I don't wish to know more.'

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE GIPSY.

" I OFTEN weep, dear mother, since I am grown up; but, like a child, I smile away my tears. We were forced to quit Pampeluna when we became better off, and Henri had saved a little.

" I was about ten, then.

" One evening, he came home sad, and I told him that a man had been watching our house. Henri could not eat. He put his arms in order, and dressed himself for a journey. He put on me a cloth jacket, and laced my boots. He took his sword and went out; how agitated he looked!

" I trembled.

" When he came back, he said :

" ' We are going away, Blanche,'

" ' For long?' I asked.

" ' For ever!' he answered.

" ' What shall we leave our nice little home?'

" ' Yes; a poor man at the corner of the

street will be our heir; he is as happy as a prince.'

" We left.

" I must tell you, as we descended the steps of our house, I saw a dark object in the deserted street, covered with a cloak; I ran to it before Henri could stop me.

" It was the man who had been watching our house all day. He was dead, and bathed in his blood.

" I fell down insensible.

" There had been a fight close by our home.

" Henri had again risked his life for me.

" When I recovered my senses, it was night; I was in a still poorer room than the one we had left. I was lying on a bed with ragged hangings. The moonlight shone brightly in at the unglazed windows. I heard whisperings beneath.

" I called Henri. He came to my bedside, and made a sign to me to be quiet. He whispered to me :

" ' They have discovered our retreat; they are below.'

" ' Who?'

" ' The companions of the man under the cloak.'

" I trembled violently.

" Henri pressed my arm.

" ' They came to the door,' he said, in a whisper; ' but I put my arm into the rings instead of a bar; they are gone down to seek a crowbar to force it open, and will be back directly!'

" ' Oh, Henri! what do they want?'

" ' They are wolves, who want the prey that I have snatched from them.'

" Ah! I felt that I was the cause of all, but for me he might have been happy, safe.

" ' Father,' I cried, ' leave me here, and save yourself!'

" ' Silly child!' answered Henri; ' if I die, I shall be forced to leave you; but they have not got me yet. Get up.'

" I heard afterwards that he had carried me in his arms from Pampeluna, and come to this place to ask an asylum.

" Henri was about to lie down and rest, when he heard the trampling of horses approaching; he guessed at once what they came for. He got up and gently descended the stairs.

" He heard our host say :

" ' I am a gentleman, and will not give up my guests.'

" Then some gold was thrown on the table and he said no more.

"A voice which Henri recognised, said:

"To work, then, at once!"

"My friend rustled back and closed the door.

"He guessed that from the window was the only means of escape.

"There was a cork-tree nailed against the wall underneath, and a garden bordered by a hedge; beyond that there was a meadow, and beyond the river flowed the river Arza.

"'You are very pale, dear,' said Henri, when I had risen; 'but you have courage enough to help me.'

"'Oh, yes!' I cried, delighted at the thought of helping him.

"'Could you get down by that staircase?' he said, leading me to the window.

"'Oh, yes, if you come too.'

"'I promise to join you, darling, very soon or never!' he answered. 'When you are down, you must throw a stone up, and glide by the hedge to the river.'

"He raised me on the window-sill, then rushed to the door. The men had already come back.

"'Make haste!' he cried impatiently.

"I descended, and then threw a stone in at the window.

"I heard a crash, and the report of fire-arms, and I could not stir.

"In a moment Henri was on the window-sill, and in the next instant he jumped out. He snatched me in his arms, and fled.

"'Are you wounded?' I cried.

"He leapt the hedge, and plunged into the river, which is both deep and rapid there.

"With one hand he held me above his head, and swam across.

"Our enemies consulted on the other side.

"'They are gone for the watch,' whispered Henri. 'We are not safe.'

"He warmed me against his bosom; for I was wet through, and my teeth chattered.

"We soon heard their horses gallop off. They thought we could not escape them long.

"Henri then recrossed the water, and came back again to the same place.

"'Now,' he said, 'dry your clothes, dear Blanche, while I dress my wound.'

"'I knew you were wounded!' I cried.

"'Only a scratch. Come!'

"We re-entered the house of the farmer who had betrayed us, who, with his wife,

was sitting over a large fire, talking and laughing.

"To throw them both on the ground and gag them, was for Henri the work of a few moments.

"'Time was,' he said, 'when I should have set fire to your house; but here is the angel that saves you.'

"His wound was on the shoulder, and bled profusely. I made some lint, and bandaged it.

"While my clothes dried, I was wrapped in his cloak.

"At about three o'clock in the morning, we left the house, with our little baggage on an old mule that Henri found in the stable, and for which he threw down two gold pieces.

"If they come back,' he said to the old host and hostess, 'tell them that Heaven protects the orphan, and that Lagardère has no time now to waste on them; but their day will come.'

"The old mule was stronger than it looked. By daybreak we reached Estella; we then went on in a cart to Burgos, thence to Madrid—a long and toilsome journey.

"One adventure alone I will relate to you.

"We were both mounted on the same mule, and, as the sun was setting, had just entered the forest of Salamanca. We met few people on the road; but here, dear mother, we first met my little Pepita—my first, my only friend. We have been separated so many years, yet I am sure she remembers me.

"Once since we have been in Paris, I thought I heard her voice calling me. I was singing in the lower room, and rushed to the window; but I could only see a grand carriage, with the blinds down. But often since I have looked out of the window, hoping to see her light figure and bright eyes.

"I must be mad!

"How should Pepita be in Paris?

"Our road led by a precipice, and by the side lay a little girl, asleep. I begged Henri to stop the mule: I got down, and knelt by her side. She was a pretty little gipsy, about my own age. If Pepita is alive, what a beautiful girl she must be!

"I kissed her; she awoke, smiling, and kissed me in return.

"But Henri frightened her.

"'Do not fear,' I said. 'he is so kind. What is your name?'

"Pepita," she answered; "and yours?"
"Blanche,"

"Our old poet talks of Aurora's tears shining like pearls; but I dare say you never cry. I cry very often. Oh, how hungry I am!"

"Henri gave her some bread and a little wine."

"She kissed his hand."

"Thanks, dear sir," she said; "you look as kind as you are handsome. Do not leave me all night on the road."

"Henri hesitated.

"Gipsies are such subtle knaves. Leaving the child on the road might only be a decoy," he muttered, thoughtfully.

"But I prayed him so earnestly, that at last he consented to take the child with us."

"On the way, Pepita told her history.

"She belonged to a gang of gypsies that came from Leon, and were on their road to Madrid. That morning—for what reason I know not—the party had been pursued by the Holy Brotherhood.

"Pepita had hid herself among the bushes when her companions fled. She wanted to rejoin them, but sought for them in vain. She walked, she ran, but she could not find them.

"Gipsies, after a journey, usually make a halt near a town. Pepita knew where to find her friends, but, so very far off.

"I persuaded Henri to take her to the place; it was not far out of our road."

"Pepita shared our meals, and my bed. The poor mule had to carry her, too. How gay we were! She was almost as young as I was, but more clever. She could dance and sing, and told us all her companions' tricks.

"We asked her what God the gipsies prayed to; she said a pitcher. She told us, that in Leon a good friar had told her about the Christian's God, and she wished to be christened.

"She was eight days with us; and when we approached Mount Bajardon, where we were to leave Pepita, I became sad. We had got used to each other, and chatted away so gaily. She loved me, and I felt towards her like a sister."

"The weather was sultry, the sky was overcast, as if a storm was pending. Large drops of rain began to fall; Henri wrapped us both in his cloak.

"Pepita had promised us the most cordial hospitality from her tribe. The road was very rough, and led up the side of the

mountain. There was a broad red glare towards the west.

"Pepita was our guide.

"How odd the light is," I cried. "I could fancy I saw two men there, on the edge of that rock."

"Not two, but ten at least," answered Pepita; "and they are armed."

"They are not, then, your brothers?"

"Oh, no!"

"How long have they been watching us?"

"Since yesterday morning," answered Flora. "I thought at first that they were travellers. It is only since we have been climbing the mountain that I suspected them; but I did not mention it, because they are before us now, and have taken a road where we are sure not to meet them."

"This was true. As we ascended higher, the rocks as far as the eye could reach, were deserted, and no sound was heard but the moaning of the wind among the trees.

CHAPTER IV.

TREACHERY.

"NIGHT closed in; the rain had ceased, heavy clouds swept over the sky. Still, from time to time the moon shed its silver light down on the defile which we had now entered, and the masses of rock on each side of us were here and there cut out sharply against the heavens.

"At the end of the defile we came upon a deep valley, at the opposite end of which was a road cut through the rocks, like the one we had passed; and at its entrance was a group of gipsies, seated round a large fire, the vigorous figures and sharp, peculiar features being clearly defined against the bright red blaze.

"They seemed to know of our approach by instinct. They did not cease drinking, laughing, and talking, but two of their party came towards us with torches.

"Flora uttered a peculiar cry; they stopped, and at a second cry returned, and took their places again around the blaze.

"We were still at a distance from the fire, when I thought I perceived some dark figures behind the gipsies, which, as we approached, disappeared.

"Would to Heaven I had spoken!

"We were in the middle of the valley,

when a great fellow with a bronze face arose, and uttered some words of welcome in an unknown tongue.

"Pepita answered in the same language. He then said to us, in Spanish :

"' Welcome ! We give you bread and salt, for our sister brings you.'

"Gypsies—even the most depraved—respect inviolably the laws of hospitality. Once promised bread and salt, we believed we had nothing to fear. We approached without distrust, and were well received. Pepita kissed the knees of the chief, who put his hands solemnly on her head, and then very ceremoniously presented Henri with some wine in a carved wooden bowl.

"Henri drank. We all closed round the fire, and a young girl came and danced in our midst.

"In ten minutes, Henri cried out, in a stifled voice :

"' Kuaves ! what have you put into the wine ?'

"He tried to rise, but his legs gave way beneath him, and he fell heavily to the ground.

"My heart stopped beating. The gypsies laughed silently round the fire. Behind them I saw arise four or five dark figures, with black cloaks and hats slouched over their faces. One of these men threw a heavy purse into the circle, and said :

"' Make an end of it, and you shall have double.'

"The chief of the gypsies answered :

"' We must have time and distance. Within twelve hours and twelve miles we must not break the bond of hospitality.'

"' Absurd fooleries !' said the man. 'Do the deed yourselves, or let us ;' and he approached Henri, lying insensible on the ground.

"The gypsy stopped him.

"' Until twelve hours are over and twelve miles travelled, we will defend our guest even against the king,' he said in a determined voice.

"All the gypsies at once surrounded Henri. Pepita whispered in my ear.

"' I will save you both at the risk of my life,' she said.

"They put me on a bed of moss in the chief's tent, under the charge of an old woman.

"I could not close my eyes. Soon every sound was hushed, except the heavy tread of the sentinel. In a little time that ceased, and I fancied I could hear a slight

rustle near me, and Pepita's bright face peeped from under the canvas ; she drew it aside, and crept in.

"The noise she made nearly awoke the old woman. Pepita approached her, and made several passes before her face, until she again slept soundly.

"Pepita made signs to me to rise and follow her. I did so, and noiselessly we both left the tent. Pepita had a lamp in her hand, which she covered with her skirt.

"' I know where they have placed him,' she said. 'Come with me.'

"At a little distance was a group of men sleeping round the embers of the fire; farther off, Pepita pointed to another tent.

"' There sleep the Christians,' she said.

"We went towards the north ; Pepita unfastened three ponies, which were tied to some trees. We took those ponies, and entered the defile.

"At a little distance we came to a cave at the door of which was a large stone. With great efforts we moved it sufficiently to allow us to slip in, and by the light of Pepita's lamp we saw Henri in a dead sleep, lying propped up against a skeleton.

"' The gypsies put him here,' cried Pepita, 'because they knew the Christians would be afraid to come, on account of the dead man.'

"I rushed to Henri, and put my arms round his neck, crying :

"' Awake ! awake !'

"Pepita put her lamp on the ground, and took from under her petticoat a small dagger, which she held in the flames.

"' Take off his sandals ! Quick, quick !' she cried.

"I obeyed her as well as I was able ; she touched with the red-hot dagger the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, uttering a low song as she did so. Gradually Henri opened his eyes and extended his limbs ; my lips were upon his forehead, when he awoke and smiled.

"' Make haste !' cried Pepita.

"Henri was already up, when he saw the skeleton against which they had placed him. He coldly said :

"' Oh ! that is the company I have been in ? In a month we should have been a pair.'

"In all haste we mounted our ponies, and guided by Pepita took our way through the defile. By sunrise we were approaching the Escorial ; by the evening we had reached Madrid.

"How happy I was, for it was arranged

that Pepita should stay with us. She wished to be instructed in the Christian religion, and was baptised in the convent of the incarnation; by the name of Maria Della Santa Cruz, and we were confirmed together.

"Things went on very well for a time; but the nuns who had stood sponsors to my poor Pepita were not satisfied with her. She tried to be good in her way; but they wished for another kind of goodness.

"One fine morning we saw her with her gipsy dress on. Henri smiled, and said:

"'Pretty bird, do you wish to take flight?'

"I cried—dearest mother, I loved her so much! She cried, too, when she kissed me; but her old habits were too strong. She left us, promising to come back; but that same evening I saw her singing and dancing on the Plaza Santa, among a crowd of people who were applauding her.

"We lived in a quiet little street, at the back of which were vast and beautiful gardens. We were no longer poor. Henri took his place at once among the best carvers in Madrid, although his fame was not then what it has become since. It was a time of peaceful happiness. Flora came often to see me, but when I entreated her to come back to live with us once more, she smiled and shook her head. I ... once said to me:

"'Blanche, she is not a proper friend for you.'

"I know not why, but Blanche came less often after that. After a time, the greatest grief that I had ever experienced came. Henri was obliged to leave me. I knew he was going into Germany and Italy, but I could learn no more.

"One morning, when I entered his room to put it in order, I saw his desk open, which he always kept locked. On it was a packet of papers, sealed with two seals, on which were the motto I had heard from his mouth when he fought for me at Venasque—'I am here!'

"It was the same paper to secure which we had recrossed the Arza and returned to the house near Pampeluna.

"There was a list of names lying by the packet—I read it. Forgive me, mother; I so longed to know why Henri quitted me. There were seven names, with Naples, Turin, Nuremberg, Glasgow, and Paris marked against them. Then two numbers were added without names.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH BLANCH TAKES COMPASSION ON A LITTLE MARQUIS.

"I was four long, long years without seeing my only friend, Henri de Lagardère. I don't know how I could have lived so long, for all my happiness fled with him. I passed those four years in a convent, where the nuns were very kind to me and taught me many things; but I did so long for him to come back. And when that joyful time arrived, when my dear friend came, I was well repaid for all my tears. Words could not express my happiness.

"After the first embrace, he looked at me, and said:

"'You are grown up now, Blanche, and you have grown more beautiful even than I expected.'

"He thought me beautiful! You cannot think, dear mother, how happy I felt. I was then about seventeen. That same day I left the convent, and we went back to our old home. But how changed! We were not to live alone as before, Henri and I. I was a young lady now. I found a good old woman, Françoise Berichon, and her grandson, Jean Marie, in our house. The old woman looked strangely at me, and then said:

"'She is very like him.'

"But whom was I like? This is one of the things I never could learn. I thought Françoise might have been an old servant in the family, and had perhaps known my father, perhaps you also, dear mother; but she, who is so ready to chatter on other things, on certain subjects is dumb. As to her grandson, he is younger than myself, and knows nothing.

"At the convent, I had not once seen Blanche; but soon after I left it, I saw her dancing on the Plaza Santa. I wanted to seek her, but Henri said:

"'You must cease to see that poor child. Remember, there are certain things which those you are bound to love would disapprove.'

"Whom am I bound to love? You, above all, sweet mother! But could you disapprove my showing gratitude to one who served us in so great a danger? Oh! I know you would not.

"My friend Henri thinks you severe, but I know you are kind and good; and then, I love you so much, you could not be severe.

"I was a young lady now, and was waited upon like a duchess. Jean Marie was my page, and Françoise kept me company.

"I was much less alone than formerly, but I was far from being as happy."

"A change had come over Henri de Lagardère; his manners now were always constrained and cold—sometimes even sad. A barrier seemed to have grown up between us.

"An explanation with Henri had always been impossible; he kept his secret even from me. I guessed that he suffered, and consoled himself with work. His fame as a carver in sword-handles was recognised everywhere. Ease, and even luxury, was in our home. The favorite of the King had said:

"I have three swords: the first, with a gold hilt, which I would give to my friend; the second, set with diamonds, which I will present to my lady-love; the third is in iron, but it is curved by Don Louis, and I will part with it only to my King."

"My chamber looked on to the beautiful gardens of the Duke of Ossana, who had been killed in a duel; therefore the palace remained closed.

"One day, I saw the windows open, and life stirring in the spacious mansion. Beautiful new furniture was brought in, and the deserted gardens were filled with statues and flowers.

"The palace had a new master, and I heard his name. He was Philip of Mantua Prince of Gonzagues.

"The next day, Henri had blinds fixed outside my windows, and said:

"I entreat you, Blanche, not to let yourself be seen by any persons who come to walk in the gardens."

"I confess, dear mother, that I was very curious. I longed to know about the Prince of Gonzagues; for I had seen Henri's list since his return to Madrid, and the two names added to that list were, Peyrolles and Gonzagues. Most of the other names had a red cross against them.

"It was not difficult to hear about the Prince of Gonzagues, for everyone spoke of him.

"He was one of the richest men in France, and a particular friend of the Regent. He had come to Madrid on a special mission, and held a court like an ambassador.

"Every morning Jean Marie came and related to me the talk of the neighbors.

"How handsome the Prince was, and how generous, people said. The gossips said, also, that his companions were sad young fellows, who climbed ladies' balconies, broke windows, beat jealous guardians and did all kinds of mischief.

"One especially, named Chaverry, was the worst of all. He was very young, they said, with a beardless chin, laughing eyes, and a fresh complexion like a girl's. All the ladies in Madrid were said to be in love with him.

"Through the openings of my blinds I sometimes saw an elegant young man walking in the garden; but he looked so modest and gentle, I thought he could not be Chaverry. Besides, he generally had a book in his hand, and walked early in the morning.

"That terrible Chaverry never could get up so early, or be so studious.

"Nevertheless, this little gentleman, so gentle and studious, was the Marquis of Chaverry. He was so handsome, so kind-looking, I could have fallen in love with him, if Henri de Lagardère had not existed. Once my blind was raised a little, and the young Marquis saw me. Afterwards, he was always in the garden, watching my windows. One day he came with a long bamboo in his hand, and, by a dexterous turn, slipped a little note between the crevices of my sun-shades.

"It was such a charming little note, dear mother! He said he wished to marry me, and that I could save a soul from ruin, if I would consent to become his wife. I felt such a wish to answer this note, if I would consent to become his wife. I felt such a wish to answer this note, for it would be a good deed. But the thought of Henri stopped me, and I gave not the slightest sign.

"The poor little Marquis waited a long time, and then retired, looking very sad. I felt sad, too.

"That same evening, I was watching for Henri on the front balcony. Soon I saw two dark figures approaching. Those two figures were Henri and the little Marquis.

"Do you know whom you are addressing, friend?" said Chaverry, proudly. "I am cousin to the Prince Gonzagues!"

"At the name, Henri's sword leapt from the scabbard. Chaverry drew also.

"The combat seemed so unequal, I cried out:

"Henri, Henri! he is but a child!"

"Henri instantly lowered his sword.

The Marquis bowed to me, and I heard him say :

"Another time."

"I scarcely knew Henri when he came in a moment after, he looked so discomposed; and, instead of speaking to me, walked up and down the room.

"Blanche," he said at last, in an altered voice, "I am not your father."

"I listened anxiously, but he only continued his walk, and wiped his forehead.

"What is the matter, dear Henri? I asked, softly.

"Do you know that gentleman?" he asked.

"I blushed a little in answering, "No." Still it was the truth.

"Blanche, I entreated you to keep your blinds down," said Henri. "I did it for your sake, not mine."

I felt angry, and answered:

"What crime have I committed, that I must always hide myself?"

"Ah!" he cried, covering his face with his hands, "I knew that this must come! Heaven help me!"

"I only understood that I had wounded him by my impatient words, and tears covered my cheeks.

"Henri—dear Henri, forgive me!"

"What have I to forgive, Blanche?"

"The uneasiness I have caused you. If you are sad, I must be wrong."

"He came and sat down by me.

"Speak frankly, Blanche, and fear nothing," he said, with all his accustomed gentleness. "I wish for one thing only in the world—your happiness. Should you grieve to leave Madrid?"

"With you?" I asked.

"With me."

I looked at him steadily, and answered:

"I will go anywhere with you, gladly. I only like Madrid because you are here."

He kissed my hand, and said, with hesitation:

"But that young man?"

I placed my hand over his mouth, laughing, and said:

"I forgive you, dear Henri, but not another word; and, if you wish it, let us go at once."

His eyes filled with tears, and I thought he would have embraced me. But he struggled against his emotion, and kissing my hand again, said gently, yet coldly:

"Since you have no objection, we will leave to-night."

"And on my account, not yours?" I cried, angrily.

I burst into tears.

"Yes, on your account," he answered, and left me.

"Oh!" I cried, "he does not love me yet!"

Our departure was fixed for ten that night. I was to go in a postchaise with Françoise; Henri was to travel on horseback, with four guards. He was rich now.

While I packed my clothes, the gardens of Osuna were being lighted up. The Prince Philip of Gonzagues gave a grand fête that night.

I was sad and unhappy, and longed for some distraction. Do these bright scenes, dear mother, ease care and sorrow?

I speak now, dear mother, of things quite recent. It is only a few months since we left Madrid, yet the time has seemed so long. Something has arisen between Henri and me.

"Oh, dear mother, if I could only pour out my heart to you!"

We left Madrid as the orchestra, under the great orange-tree of the palace, gave out its first note. Henri said to me:

"Do you regret nothing, Blanche?"

"Only my former friend," I answered, for I felt that my adopted father was changed to me.

We went straight to Saragossa; thence over the Pyrenees to Venerque, then to Bayonne, where we took ship for Ostend.

Henri wanted to stop in the valley of Louron, between Luz and Bagnères. He wished to see Don Bernard, an old priest, who had been chaplain of Caylus under its last lord. Once past the frontier, we left Françoise and Jean Marie in a little village by the banks of the Clarabide. Then Henri and I travelled alone on horseback to a bleak rock called the Hachez, on which stands an old castle.

It was a dark, cold February morning, and the castle of Caylus-Tarrides stood out like a heavy black Colossus against the cloudy sky.

What tales it seemed to tell of the solemn, mournful past! Its vastness, its grandeur, oppressed me. I felt that no one could have been happy there.

And when there are such fearful stories told of the last lord, who was called Cay-

lus the Gaoler, and is reported to have killed both his wives, and his daughter and son-in-law.

"The castle is now uninhabited, and is kept by an old man, who is deaf and nearly blind. This old man said the present lord had not been there for sixteen years. He is no other than Prince Philip of Gonzagues.

"Is it not strange? Dear mother, that name haunts me.

"The old man told Henri that Don Bernard had been dead some years. He would not let us into the castle, so I thought we should return to the valley.

"But these places seemed to have a mournful attraction for Henri. We went to breakfast at a small inn close to the moat of the castle.

"We sat down to a humble table, and a woman of about forty came to serve us.

"'Good woman,' said Henri, suddenly, 'you were here the night of the murder!'

"She let fall a flagon of wine, and looking at him distrustfully said:

"'Were you here, then?'

"'Perhaps,' replied Henri; 'but that does not concern you. I want to know some things, and will pay for the information.'

"The woman shook her head.

"We shut up our doors, and closed our windows,' she said. 'It is best to see nothing in these matters.'

"How many dead were found in the trenches next morning?"

"Seven," answered the woman; "seven without counting the young lord."

"And what was done?"

"Oh, it was said that the Marquis was in the right, on account of that little window down there that was found open."

"I understood that the young lord was accused of wanting to enter the castle by that little window. But why?"

"The woman answered:

"Our young lady was beautiful and rich."

"What a sad history in a few words! How that little window fascinated me!"

"I pushed my plate from me; Henri did the same, and we went out.

"It was there," said the hostess, "on that bank, that the young lord placed the child."

"Oh, then there was a child!" I cried.

"What a strange look Henri gave me! It seemed to say, 'That child was you!' but he asked the woman:

"What became of the child?"
"It is dead," she answered.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE CHURCHYARD.

"HENRI looked around on the dismal landscape thoughtfully and sadly; with his sword he traced lines on the ground. At last he came to the place where I was standing, and said:

"It must be there!"

"Yes," said the hostess, "it was there that the body of the young lord was found."

"What was done with the body?" asked Henri.

"I drew back trembling.

"I heard it was taken to Paris, and buried in the cemetery of Magloire," the woman replied.

"Yes," thought Henri, aloud, "Magloire belongs to the family of Lorraine."

"He went to the low window, and with the handle of his sword tried its fastenings.

"The woman said:

"Oh, it is well secured, and has not been opened since that night."

"What was heard that night?" asked Henri.

"Oh, good sir, the most fearful noises—the clashing of swords, horrible oaths, and every now and then two brave voices crying out: 'I am here!—I am here!'"

"What strange thoughts awoke in me, dear mother! I remembered this motto so well, since the first time I had heard Henri call it out, when I had been carried away from the inn.

"The same motto was also on the mysterious paper.

"Henri must have mingled in this dreadful scene. How, he alone could tell me.

"The sun was setting as we left the place, and I often turned to look again at the gaunt rock crowned with its massive towers.

"That night I dreamt of a lady in black, holding a child in her arms, hanging over a pale young man with closed eyes. Was it you, dear mother?

"The next day we went on board the vessel that was to convey us to Flanders, and Henri said:

"Very soon, Blanche, you shall know

all. Heaven grant that it may make you happier!"

"His voice was sad.

"Can it be that the knowledge of my family will bring me sorrow? If so, still, dear mother, I long to see you."

"We landed at Ostend, and at Brussels Henri received a large packet sealed with the royal arms of France. We set off the next day for Paris.

"It was already dark when we entered that city. I was thoughtful; for my heart told me that there, dear mother, I should see you.

"We passed down a long, narrow street, and then into a lane, which brought us to a church surrounded by a churchyard.

"I have since heard it was the Church Magloire. Opposite was a grand mansion belonging to the Prince of Gonzagues.

"We entered the churchyard. A lamp gave a dim light around. Henri stopped before a vault upon which was sculptured the figure of a young man. He kissed its forehead, and murmured, with emotion:

"Brother, I am come. Heaven is my witness, I have done my best to keep my promise!"

"I heard a slight noise, and turned. Françoise and Jean Marie had followed us, and were kneeling at a little distance. Henri also knelt and prayed for a long time. When he got up, he said:

"Kiss that statue, Blanche."

"I obeyed, and then asked wherefore. He hesitated a moment, and said:

"Because the man whose stone effigy you see there was a noble fellow, and I loved him."

"I kissed the cold marble forehead again.

"Henri pressed my hand to his heart. How tenderly he can love, dear mother! Oh, why cannot he love me?"

"A few minutes later, we reached the house in which I am now writing. Since we entered, I have not once passed the threshold. I am more alone than ever, for Henri is more busy in Paris even than elsewhere. I am not allowed to go out, and only cautiously may place myself at the window.

"Oh! if all these precautions proved that he was jealous, I should not mind them. How happy I should be to keep myself hidden for him; but I remember those words at Madrid:

"For your sake, not mine."

"Not for his sake! And love alone, dear mother, is jealous.

"I am alone constantly. From underneath my drawn curtain I can see the busy crowd. All these people are free. I see the house opposite; a family on each story—young women with smiling, rosy children. How happy they look! I can see as far as the windows of the Palais Royal, often lighted up of a night for the Regent's fêtes.

"The ladies of the court pass sometimes in their sedan-chairs, with handsome gentlemen by their side, and I hear the gay music for dancing. It keeps me awake all night sometimes; but one smile, one kind word from him, and I forget it all, and am happy.

"But do not think, dear mother, that I have reason to complain. Oh, no! Henri is most considerate and attentive. And though his manner to me is cold, is that a fault?

"A thought has sometimes crossed my mind, dear mother. Knowing his scrupulous delicacy and honor, I have sometimes fancied that perhaps my rank is higher, my fortune greater than his, and that he fears to love me.

"Oh, if it were only this, how willingly would I renounce rank, fortune, everything for his love! Could I love you, dear mother, less if you were poor?

"Henri's only visitor is a hunchback, who comes very often to his room on the first floor; yet they are never seen together, which makes all the neighbors wonder.

"The other evening the hunchback came and stayed all night. The next day Henri was sadder than usual, and said:

"Men placed too high, become giddy. What gratitude can one expect from princesses? Besides what service is required by such base coin? If the noble lady, for whom I might have risked my honor and my life, could not love me because she was at the top of the ladder, I at the bottom, I would fly so far away that I should never know whether she insulted me with her gratitude."

"Mother, I am sure the hunchback had been talking of me.

"Oh! it is indeed too true, he has not only risked for me his honor and his life; but he has done much more. Has he not devoted to me eighteen years of his proud manhood? How can one pay such a debt? How he is deceived, is he not, dear mother?"

" You would love him ; you would despise me if my whole heart, except my love for you, were not his. But how dare I tell him this ? Oh, I feel so timid with him—much more than when a child. It would not be ingratitude only, it would be infamy not to love him who has done everything for me. And what mother, were she even cousin to the King, would not be proud to have Henri Lagardère for a son ? Is he not the handsomest, the bravest, the most noble of men ? If there were among these nobles, these grand ladies, a wretch so lost, so perverted as to say to me :

" 'Blanche, forget your friend.'

" The idea alone makes me shudder. But you, dear mother, whom I have so loved, so cherished, you will kiss me and smile on me.

" However high Heaven may have placed you, you have something better than your rank ; it is your heart ! Even the suspicion wrongs you. Oh ! forgive me that I have dared to write of it. I have no longer light to write, and I close my eyes that I may see your sweet face in my dreams. Come, gentle mother !"

With these words Blanche's manuscript closed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VOICE OF SLANDER.

It was now dark, and Toxio entered softly.

He was the son of the nimble page who appears in the first chapters of this story, bringing Nevers' letter to Lagardère. He had died a soldier's death, and his old mother had now only a grandson left.

" Grandmother wishes to know, mademoiselle, whether you will sup here or in the other room ?" the boy said, respectfully.

" What time is it ?" asked Aurora, waking from her reverie.

" Supper-time, lady."

" How late he is !" murmured Aurora. " Lay the supper here," she added, speaking to the boy.

Berichon brought the lamp and set it on the table.

" The curtains are not well closed, child," cried his grandmother, from the kitchen.

Berichon shrugged his shoulders as he obeyed.

" One would think," he grumbled, " we were afraid of the galleys."

The boy was so newhat in Blanche's position. He was ignorant of everything, and very anxious to learn.

" You are sure he is not in his room ?" asked Blanche.

" Sure ! are we sure of anything here ?" exclaimed the boy. " I heard the Hunchback, and went to listen."

" You did wrong," said Blanche severely ; " but did you hear anything ? Where can he have gone ?"

" Oh ! only the Hunchback knows that, my lady. It is very odd that a gentleman so straight and upright as Chevalier—I mean Master Louis—should take a fancy to a fellow as crooked as a corkscrew, who comes and goes by the back door."

" Is he not the master ? Has he not a right to choose what friends he likes ?" interrupted Blanche.

" Yes, of course he can do as he pleases ; he can go out, and come in, and shut himself up all day with his ape, if he pleases. Nevertheless, it makes the neighbors talk, my lady."

" You talk too much with the neighbors," answered Blanche, reproachfully.

" I !" cried the boy ; " I talk ! I say, grandmother, my young lady says I am a chatter now !"

" Oh ! I have known that a long time, child," replied the old woman ; " and an idler, too."

Berichon crossed his arms in an attitude of despair.

" Well !" he cried ; " I suppose, then, that I have every fault. You'd better tell me that at once ! I, who never say a word, but only listen ; though it is not so easy to be silent when asked so many questions."

" What questions ?"

" Oh, all sorts of thing : where we came from ; where we are going ; the age of the Chevalier—I mean Master Louis ; your age, Mademoiselle Blanche ; if we are French, and if we are Catholics ; if you confess, mademoiselle, at St. Eustache, or St. Germain ; why you never go out ? Madame Moynier laid a wager with La Guicharde that you had but one leg. Why Master Louis goes out so much ? Why the Hunchback comes so often ? Oh ! are they not curious about him ? They say —"

" And you listen to all this nonsense, Berichon ?" interrupted Blanche,

"No, indeed, mademoiselle; I know better how to behave. But only to hear them, especially the women! I can't step out into the street but what my ears burn! 'Hallo, Berichon!' cries the shopkeeper opposite; 'come and taste my new wine, it is so nice!' 'Oh, that dear boy would like a tart!' calls out the pastry cook; and the woman who keeps the butter-shop; and the one at the corner who mends old fur, and even the lawyer's wife, are all after me. Just listen, mademoiselle, how they go on; it is really fine fun! La Balahaut, the tall, dark woman with spectacles says, 'How pretty and graceful she is!' meaning you, mademoiselle. 'She is about twenty, is she not, dear?' 'I don't know,' I answer gruffly. 'She's a very sweet creature, but she does not look like the niece of a carver of sword-handles. Is she his niece, my love?' 'No,' I reply. 'His daughter, then, perhaps, my child?' 'No!' and I try to pass on, and then they all make a circle round me, crying out, 'If she is not his daughter, is she his wife? is she his sister? his niece? or an orphan that he has picked up somewhere?' And I scream out, 'No! no! no!' with all my might."

"You were wrong, Berichon," said Blanche, sadly, "to tell an untruth. I am a poor child that he has brought up in charity."

"What an idea!" cried Tonio.

"The next time, tell them so," returned Blanche; "I am not ashamed; and why hide his goodness?"

"How angry the master would be if he heard of such a thing!" cried the boy. "Charity, indeed!"

"Would to Heaven they said nothing worse in speaking of us both."

"On, you know, then—"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing, mademoiselle."

"Speak, I desire—I command!" said Blanche, imperiously.

Berichon looked down, twiddling the napkin in his hand.

"On, you know, miss, only gossip. They say he is too young to be your father, and since he is so careful of you, and is not your husband—"

"Go on!" murmured Aurora, her pale features cold and stern.

"On, mademoiselle, if he is neither the father, the uncle, the brother, the husband, he must be—"

Blanche covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASTER LOUIS.

BERICHEON already bitterly repented of what he had said; he saw her sobbing, and thought. "If he were to come in just now!"

"While he, who is neither the father, the brother, nor the husband of a poor forlorn child," said Blanche, proudly, "is Henri Lagardère, he is her friend, her preserver, her benefactor. Oh! even their calumnies show me how high he is above other men. Since he is suspected, others must act differently. I love him well—I shall learn to adore him soon—the only creature in the world who has cherished, loved me."

"And how he does love you, miss! Grandmother and I see it every day. It is, 'How has she slept? Was she happy yesterday?' 'Is there anything she wishes for?' And if we can only discover a wish, how pleased he is!"

"Yes," said Blanche, "he loves me as if I were indeed his child."

"Not exactly," said Berichon, softly.

Blanche shook her head. She so dearly loved to speak of Lagardère; she did not think of the age or condition of her confidant.

"I am always alone," she said, "and he comes in so late ever since we have been in Paris."

"Oh, I wager he is upstairs now!" cried Berichon, "if you would not mind just calling him with your gentle voice. I am afraid of going up, since he caught me once looking through the keyhole of the locked-up room. And if you only knew, miss, how much I wish supper to be over to-night, that I may have a peep at all the grand doings at the Palais Royal! Have you not seen, miss," continued the chatterer, "all the coaches, and the flowers and shrubs, the lamps, the pastry, the ices? How jolly it must be! Wouldn't I like to be there, that is all!"

"Go and help your grandmother," said Blanche.

"Poor young lady!" thought the lad, going; "but no doubt she longs for a dance."

"Oh, how long he stays every night!" said Blanche to herself. "He forbids me to go out; this mystery always around, about us—he hides his name. I know he is in danger. His enemies, or rather mine, are powerful; for I know he does this for me."

As if he thought I could not read his joy, his sorrow, his anxiety, in his face! He wishes me not to know his dangers, his trials - as if this wretched uncertainty were not far harder to bear than any trouble! If I might only share his thoughts, his feelings—"

A slight noise was heard above. She ran joyfully to meet Lagardère, who, lighted by Tonio descended the stairs. Lagardère, whatever was his age, was still a young man. Light curling hair played over a clear white forehead, and his cheeks still retained the color of youth, which would have even given him an effeminate look, were it not for the brilliancy of his eyes, his well-marked eyebrows, and the firm expression of his mouth, which denoted both strength and resolution. He was dressed in black velvet. From the top of the stairs his eyes already sought Blanche, but he repressed the feeling. An observer would have guessed at once that his life was passed in continued restraint, and that the iron will of a stoic repressed the movements of a tender, affectionate heart.

"You have been waiting for me Blanche," he said.

Françoise put out her red face from the kitchen, and said:

"As if it were right to make the poor child cry!"

Blanche threw her arms round his neck.

"Look, Henri, if there are tears in my eyes?"

"Nevertheless," cried Françoise, bringing in the principal dish, "that does not prevent our young lady from being always alone, and that makes her sad."

"Did I ask you to make any complaint?" marmured Blanche, red with vexation.

They sat down to table opposite each other.

Berichon stood behind Blanche. Supper was scarcely over when Master Louis said to him—

"That will do—leave us."

"Grandmother," said Berichon, going into the kitchen, "I wager something is going to happen; did you see how concerned master looked?"

"Go and wash up," answered Françoise, "and don't meddle with other people's business. Master is as strong and as brave as a lion, but our young lady is a match for him."

"Oh! she does not look it," cried Berichon, astonished.

"That is the very reason," answered the grandmother.

"You are not happy, I fear, Blanche?" said Lagardère, when they were alone.

"I see you so seldom."

"And do you blame me, dear child?"

"Oh, no, indeed; sometimes I cannot help being uneasy. Children, you know, Henri, are frightened in the night, and in the daytime forget their fear. It is the same with me; when I see you, I feel happy again."

"You have for me the tender affection of a daughter, and I thank you," said Lagardère, turning away his head.

"And you?—do you love me as if you were my father, Henri?" asked Blanche.

Master Louis got up and advanced toward her.

Blanche placed him a chair, and said joyfully:

"Oh, come, let us talk as we used to do. Do you remember that happy time?"

Henri answered sadly:

"That time is past."

Blanche took his hand, and looked at him searchingly.

"You also suffer, Henri?"

He shook his head.

"Once," he said, "I had so beautiful, so glorious a dream, that it has taken away my peace. It was only a dream; but now I am awake. I have sworn, and I will keep my word. I am old, darling child, to begin a new life."

"Old!" cried Blanche, laughing.

Henri did not laugh.

"At my age," he said, seriously, "others have a wife—children."

"And you have not," interrupted Blanche. "Henri, you have only me."

He made a movement as if to speak, and stopped. Blanche went on.

"You have only me, and I—I am an obstacle to your happiness. Do you know what they say?—'She is not his daughter, his sister, his wife.'"

"Blanche," interrupted Master Louis, "for eighteen years you have been all my happiness."

"You are generous. I thank you," murmured Blanche; and after a short pause, added: "I know nothing of your thoughts or your actions, Henri; but when I am alone, it makes me very sad to think that without me a beloved wife would have cheered your solitude, without me you would have needed no concealment, no disguise—you might have been free and

happy. Henri, you have been more to me than a kind father; for me you have smothered your love, crushed your heart's affections."

"Dear child!" said Master Louis, turning from her, "you deceive yourself," then he added, with emotion, "Blanche, when you no longer see me, will you remember me?"

The poor girl turned pale; had Louis turned he must have seen her agitation.

"Are you going to leave me again?" she murmured.

"No—I don't know—perhaps," he answered in a trembling voice.

"Oh! I entreat you, I entreat you, have pity upon me! If you go, take me with you."

He did not answer, and she continued, with tears in her eyes—

"You are angry because I am exacting, unjust. I will never be so again. Oh, Henri, I am happy when I see you every day. Oh! you do not answer me, Henri—listen to me!"

In a childlike way she turned his face towards her; her eyes were full of tears.

She knelt beside him and said—

"Henri, dear friend, father! Were you happy, your happiness should be my own; but I will share your tears."

He drew her towards him; then his arms relaxed, and he said, in a bitter voice:

"We are both fools, Blanche to go on thus."

"Oh, Henri, how changed you are since the day you told me you were not my father."

"Yes, the day you asked me to spare the Marquis of Chaverry—I remember it well. The Marquis has come back to Paris."

She did not answer, but he could read her thoughts in her eloquent features. He kissed her hand, and rose to leave.

She held him fast.

"Stop," she said; "I see I am a trouble and care to you; I will go—oh! I know not whither; but at least you shall be delivered from a charge that has become too heavy."

"To leave me, Blanche, you need not fly," murmured Henri.

"Then you will send me away?" cried the poor girl, deeply affected. She was kneeling with her head upon his knee. "Oh! Henri," she cried, bursting into tears, "so little would make me happy—

so little! How happy and joyful I used to run to meet you." He gently stroked her beautiful hair. "Oh, be as you were then, I ask no more," she continued; "tell me when you are happy, that I may rejoice with you; but above all, tell me when you are in trouble, that all your sorrow may pass into my heart. Oh! it would do you good. Had you a daughter, a dearly-loved daughter, would you not do so to her?"

"A daughter!" he repeated, and his face became sad.

"Oh! I know that I am nothing to you; but never tell me again."

He passed his hands over his eyes.

"Blanche," he said calmly, "there is a life of pleasure, honor, riches, you know nothing of, dear child!

"And why need I know it?"

"I wish you to know it; he added, lowering his voice, "you will have to choose to choose rightly, you must know."

He got up. There was an expression of thought and resolution on his noble features, as he said, "It is your last day of doubt and ignorance, and perhaps my last day of youth and hope."

"Oh! explain yourself, Henri, for heaven's sake!"

"I have acted," he cried, looking up. "Heaven is my witness—I have acted according to my conscience. Farewell, Aurora; consider, reflect to-night, consult your reason rather than your heart. I will not say anything to bias you. I wish your choice to be free. Remember only—whatever may happen to-night—I have only your good in view; and take comfort if I do not soon return, in the thought that near or at a distance, I watch over you."

He kissed her hand and departed. Her eyes followed him as he mounted the stairs and he kissed his hand again before entering his room.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO YOUNG GIRLS.

BLANCHE was alone. The conversation she had had with Henri left her confounded, almost stupefied—her thoughts wandered while her heart was sorely wounded. She dreaded what might happen that night. Although she had in her short life passed through many adventures, his arm had al-

ways protected, supported her. She felt that, whatever might come upon her now, she must bear alone. Had he not told her to think, to choose for herself? A fearful dread came over her that she might have to decide, to choose between her mother and Henri; for in regard to riches, rank and name, had she not already made her choice? Would she not willingly sacrifice all for him?

She opened her window, and leant out to cool her burning brow. Many persons were passing; a crowd had assembled round the Palais Royal, which was brilliantly lighted up. Already sedans and litters were bending their way thither between a double line of curious spectators. A strong desire to make one of that assembly came over Blanche. In the kitchen, Tonio played tempter to his grandmother. After they had finished their own supper, and put away, the page went for a few minutes to the door, and returned with such a vivid account of the lights, the decorations, the ladies in diamonds, and other splendors, that Françoise was tempted to venture into the street to look at them, leaving the street-door open. Once there, the gossiping neighbors made her for once forget her charge. Blanche remained alone. The young girl heard a slight noise, turned, and uttered a scream on seeing before her a stranger in pink domino. Her scream was answered by a joyful laugh, and the visitor, pulling off her mask, discovered the playful face of Pepita.

"Pepita," cried Aurora, "it is indeed you!"

The young girls embraced each other.

"How happy I am to see you! But how could you get in? I am forbidden to see anyone."

"Well, your prison is well guarded—the door wide open. No one to say be off!"

Blanche passed quickly through the other room into the kitchen, calling Françoise and Tonio; but receiving no answer, and perceiving the street-door wide open, went and closed it without locking it; then returned to her friend.

"How much you are grown, and how handsome!" cried Pepita.

"And you too," returned Blanche.

And they regarded each other with joyful admiration.

"And this dress," said Blanche. "Oh! I guess you are going to act to night."

"No, indeed," returned the other. "I am going to the ball."

"What ball?"

"To the Regent's, of course," answered Pepita, drawing herself up. "I am going to be presented to his Royal Highness by the Princess Palatine. I dare say you are surprised, so am I myself; but such strange things have come to pass—I will tell you all about it."

"But how did you find out where I lived?"

"Oh! I knew, and was coming to see you to-morrow. I had permission, for I am kept a prisoner like yourself, only my cage is far prettier than yours. When, behold! this evening, just as I had finished dressing, a knock came at my door, and a little hunchback presented himself, and bowing very low, said, 'If you please, I will conduct you where you wish to go.' The notion tickled my fancy, and I consented at once. He led me out by a back way into a carriage, jumped in himself, and in no time we were at your door. I turned to thank him, and he had vanished."

"But why are you to be presented to the Regent, Flora?"

"Oh! my dear," returned her friend, throwing herself into an easy chair, "it is all a mistake, a dream, an illusion, my being a gipsy. I am the noble daughter of a princess—that is all."

"You!" cried Pepita.

"Yea, I," said the other, complacently.

"Gipsies, you know, do such odd things; they get down chimneys—after the fires are out, of course—and so introduce themselves into palaces, and carry off some valuables, and among the rest, the young heiress in her cradle."

"Delightful!" cried Blanche, pleased with her friend's good fortune. "And what is your name?"

"The Princess of Nevers."

"Never!" repeated Blanche—"one of the highest names in France."

"Yes, my love; it appears that we are cousins to the King."

"But how!"

"On that point, my dear, I am as ignorant you are; but I am to know soon, at least, my guardian the Prince Gonzagues —"

"Gonzagues!" echoed Blanche, shuddering.

"Yes; the Prince is the husband of the Princess of Nevers, my mother."

Blanche remembered her visit to the castle of Caylus. The child then spoken of was Pepita.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Pepita.

"I was thinking of that name, Gonzagues. Do you love your guardian—your mother's husband?"

"Oh, Caramba!" cried the young Princess, forgetting her dignity; "I have seen my mother, and have a great respect for her, for she has suffered so much; and I love her, too, only not as one ought to love a mother. And as for the Prince, her husband, you need have no fear to tell me anything about him."

"Well, then," said Blanche, "that name has been mingled with all my terrors as a child and my unhappiness since. The first time my friend risked his life for me, I heard that name; I heard it again when we were attacked at Pampeluna; also on that night that you saved our lives; at Madrid, Gonzagues again; and once more at the castle of Caylus."

Pepita was silent for a few moments; then she said:

"Did Don Louis ever tell you that you were the daughter of some great personage?"

"No—never."

"Oh, I can't bear thinking," cried Pepita, "but it seems to me that you look more like a princess than I do. But of what use is puzzling one's brains? It is best to take things as they come, as my former friends the gypsies used to say, who consoled themselves for everything by saying it was fate. But what I cannot understand is, that the Prince Gonzagues should be a robber—a murderer. Oh, it is impossible! Perhaps there are many Gonzagues. Besides, if the Prince were really your persecutor, is it likely Don Louis would have brought you to Paris, where he lives?"

"Ah!" said Blanche, "but such precautions are taken! I am forbidden to go out—even to show myself at the window."

"Oh, he is jealous!" cried Pepita.

"Oh, Pepita!" cried Blanche, reproachfully.

Donna Cruz executed a pirouette.

"Oh, yes, your Master Louis, your handsome Lagardère, your knight-errant, is jealous! Don't I know that lovers already measure the height of your windows?" Blanche blushed crimson, but remained silent.

"And is he still as handsome, as proud, as gentle as ever? And tell me, dear—whisper it in my ear—do you love him?"

"Why should I not own aloud that I love him?" answered Blanche, proudly.

"And are you happy—very happy?"

"Yes, when he is here."

"Oh, capital!" cried Pepita, looking around rather contemptuously. "True love in a cottage! But I begin to think that Master Louis must be a sorcerer, do you know. Once I loved, or thought I loved some one; and he put his hand on my forehead, and said: 'Pepita, he can never love you,' and I was cured."

"And who was it that you loved?" cried Blanche, anxiously. "Oh, I am sure it was himself! You my rival!"

CHAPTER X.

THE THREE WISHES.

"Oh! so he loves you only!" cried Pepita, embracing her friend warmly.

"And you?"

"Oh! I am cured of my folly; besides I am sure he is a sorcerer. Do, now, just wish for something, and see if it will not come true. Now, don't you wish to go to the Regent's ball to-night?"

"But I have no dress, no ornaments," objected Blanche, though laughing at her friend's earnestness.

"Never mind; only wish one, two, three!" answered Pepita, seriously; for she believed in magic, and, it must be owned, rather feared it. But what was her astonishment, when Berichon suddenly thrust open the door, crying out:

"Here is all sorts of finery for our young lady—such a number of bows, dresses, and flowers, and I know not what. Come in, this is Master Lagardère's house."

"Oh! what do you say?" cried Blanche frightened.

"Don't be alarmed, miss; I know what I am about. No more hiding—no more mystery."

Five or six young girls now entered, followed by men carrying bandboxes and parcels. Pepita was lost in astonishment.

"Oh! he is a sorcerer," she muttered; "I knew he was."

"Come in, ladies—come in, gentlemen!" called out Berichon, much excited. "There is a blessing on our house now. I will go and fetch Madame Balabault, who is dying with curiosity to know how we live."

I never tasted anything like her angelica!"

All entered the dining-room, and placed their bandboxes on the large table. Behind them came a page, dressed very plainly, who saluted Blanche respectfully, and presented her with a note enveloped in silk. He again bowed, and retired.

"At all events, wait for the answer," cried Berichon, running after him.

But the page was already at the other end of the street, where he was joined by a gentleman wrapped in a large cloak, whom the reader might recognise by his long chin—the rest of his face being hidden—to be Peyrolles.

"Is it done?" he asked. "And where have you left our men?"

"Close by, with two sedans."

"What, two? There must be some mistake! Go back to the palace at your best speed, and tell those two fellows who have been about all day—Cocardasse and Passepoil—that their work is all cut out for them, and bring them to that house. But be sure not to tell them whom it belongs to; and if they ask, say only women live there."

The page set off full speed and Peyrolles disappeared in the crowd.

In the house, Blanche opened her note, and cried:

"It is his handwriting!"

"And," said Pepita, "here is a card of invitation to the ball, just like mine."

And she held it in her fingers, as if afraid to touch it.

Blanche read the note, which was the same the Hunchback had written, and passed it to Pepita.

"Do you believe it?" cried the latter.

"Oh, yes," answered her friend, with a confident smile. "I have good reason for not being astonished at anything to-night."

The bandboxes and parcels now displayed their ravishing contents on the table, and Pepita gave up the idea that they would turn into dry leaves. They consisted of a very elegant ball dress of rich white silk, embroidered in silver, with corals and pearls. Around the sleeve, the bodice, and the skirt, was a trimming of humming-birds' plumage. It was the last fashion.

The Marchioness d'Aubignac had just made herself a reputation at court by a similar costume, which Mr. Law had made her a present of. Besides the dress, there was magnificent lace, and a fan of unknown

value. Pepita admired and wondered, and still had an indistinct notion that all these things would turn into shaving or leaves.

But there was one—and not the least curious—spectator, that no one dreamt of. It was the little man who had brought

Pepita—who had forged Lagardère's name, and had hired Medor's butch—the little Hunchback, *Æsop* the Second. He had hidden behind the door of the upper chamber, which door being partly opened, gave him, over the heads of the assistants, a good view of what was passing below.

"In faith," he muttered, with an inward chuckle, "the Prince does things in style, and the rascal Peyrolles has decided taste."

At the sight of all these elegant things, Blanche's heart beat with delight. It never occurred to her, as it did to her friend, how much they must have cost. Lagardère sent them—that was enough. Her only embarrassment was, she had no lady's-maid. Two of the young girls, as if they had guessed her thoughts, came forward and offered their services, while the rest withdrew.

"What! you are not going to put yourself into the hands of those creatures?" whispered Pepita, in alarm.

"Why should I not?"

"Do you really think of putting on that dress?"

"Certainly."

"You are courageous," murmured the gipsy. "But you are right; it is a demon of exquisite taste, and why not adorn yourself with his gifts?"

They all retired into the bedroom except Françoise and her grandson. The former took out her knitting, and began her reflections.

"Who is that bold girl?"

"What, the young lady in the pink domino, whose eyes sparkle so?"

"Yes; did you let her in?"

"No; she was here before I came back."

"I tell you what, little one," said Françoise, gravely, "there's something about all this that does not please me at all. I like to see things clearly."

"Oh, grandmother, it is as simple as can be. Our young lady wanted to go to the ball, so master went out and bought her a ticket—for they are to be sold, I can tell you, in the Rue Quincampoix; and then, as a pleasant surprise, he sent home all this finery."

"But this finery must have cost an enormous sum."

"How green you are, grandmother!—only old satin and frippery."

Then a knock was heard at the street-door.

"Who is coming now?" said Françoise, crossly. "Put up the bar."

"Oh! there is no need now; we are no longer playing at hide-and-seek."

A louder knock.

"If it should be thieves?" muttered Berichon, who was not brave.

"Thieves! nonsense—when the street is lighted up, and full of people."

"Nevertheless, I will put up the bar."

But it was too late. The door was gently opened, and the figure of a man with an enormous pair of moustaches presented itself. He cast a rapid glance around, and said:

"By Jove! this must be the dove's nest;" and turning to the door, "Pray come in, friend; there is here only a respectable duenna and her chick."

He then advanced majestically, shaking his cloak, one hand on his hip, and a parcel under his arm. The friend, who now advanced, carried also a parcel. He was thin and short, and, though also armed, was of much less formidable appearance.

How bitterly did Jean Marie now regret he had not put up the bar! He now stepped behind his grandmother, who by far the bravest of the two, asked:

"Pray what is your business here?"

Cocardasse, for it was he, with his usual noble courtesy, touched his hat, then winked at his companion, who winked in return. The dove, as Cocardasse thought, must be in the room under the door of which streamed a ray of light; on the other side was a door half open, leading into the kitchen, with a key on the outside.

"Venerable dame," began Cocardasse, "our business is of consequence; is it not here that lives——"

"No, it's not here," shouted Jean Marie from behind his grandmother.

"What a clever youth, to know before-hand whom I wanted!—is he not, Passepoil?"

"We live by ourselves here," said Françoise, drily.

"Passepoil!" cried Cocardasse; "would you have thought such a respectable person could have told such a fib?"

"No, on my honor," said his friend, sadly.

"Come, come, no more words!" exclaimed Dame Françoise; "get along with you; a fine time of night to disturb people so!"

"The lady is in the right," continued Cocardasse; "still we cannot leave without an answer."

"That is the fact," insisted his companion, who, coming now clearly forward, said, "Get out your handkerchief, I have mine; you take the boy, I'll take the lady in hand."

On grand occasions Passepoil came out strongly, sometimes even stronger than Cocardasse himself. He now made his way towards the kitchen, and the intrepid Françoise rushed forward to stop him. Berichon tried to make his way into the street, to call for help; but Cocardasse seized him by the ear, and whispered:

"If you make a noise, I'll strangle you."

The terrified boy was silent. Cocardasse tied his handkerchief over his mouth.

In the meanwhile Passepoil, at the cost of a few scratches and a handful of hair, had gagged Dame Françoise and carried her into the kitchen, Cocardasse also carried Berichon. They fastened them both securely to the dresser, then double-locked the door upon them.

Cocardasse and Passepoil remained absolute masters of the field.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO DOMINOS.

In the Street Du Chantre the shops were closed, and most of the people gone to augment the crowd at the gates of the Palais Royal. But our gossips did not scramble in the dirt, or brave the anger of porters and coachmen, to see the splendid toilets of the ladies, or to gaze on grand nobles and princesses. By this time presidents were thought nothing of; ministers were hardly noticed; ambassadors even were at a discount. Still the crowd pressed forward, increasing every minute, showing an anxiety that even the Regent, or the young King himself, would not have excited.

Whom could they expect?

The Scotchman Law, the mammon-god who was to make them a nation of millionaires—Mr. Law, of Lauriston, now their idol, their benefactor, whose horses work-

ed no longer, for men were harnessing themselves in their stead. The crowd would have patiently waited all night to get a sight of the man, whom a few months later, in the same place, the populace strove to strangle.

The Street Du Chantre was dark and deserted, and seemed asleep, though so near the crowd and lights. Opposite the house of Lagardère, in a dark passage, stood immovable and silent six men, with their eyes fixed on the door that Cocardasse and Passepoil had entered. Two sedan-chairs were close by.

The two, after they had so happily disposed of Françoise and Tonio, looked at each other with mutual admiration.

"Well, child, you have not forgotten your trade," said Cocardasse.

"Nor you either," rejoined his friend, "we have only lost our handkerchiefs."

If we have often to blame Passepoil, we must not forget his good points.

"Well," said the Gascon, "the work is over. When there is no Lagardère in the way, everything runs on wheels."

"Thank goodness, Lagardère is far away off, sixty leagues to the frontiers, alone."

"Don't let us lose time; here are two other doors," showing the one on the landing above, and the one leading into Blanche's room.

Passepoil stroked his chin.

"I will just put my eye to the keyhole," said he, going towards the latter apartment.

A terrible look from Cocardasse stopped him.

"By my soul, I shan't allow it. The little beauty is at her toilet; respect propriety."

"Ah!" said Passepoil, with a sigh, "my noble friend, what fine sentiments!"

"Oh, that is my way, and you may be sure, friend, that my society will at last cure you. The true philosopher has to conquer his passion."

"I am the slave of mine," muttered Passepoil, humbly.

"A victory that costs nothing is no triumph," exclaimed the Gascon; "just step up there and look round."

Passepoil obeyed.

"Locked," he said, as he tried Master Louis's door.

"And the keyhole? Here it is allowable."

"Dark as pitch."

"Well, let us consider the Prince Gomzagues' instructions."

"He has promised us each fifty pistoles on certain conditions;" and they each of them took up the parcel he had brought. "I wonder whether the first is absolute?" pondered Cocardasse, in a vexed voice.

The formality rejoiced his friend. They placed their parcels on the table. While they were speaking, the Hunchback had opened the upper door without noise, and stood listening to them.

"In the second place," continued Cocardasse, "the Prince said: 'You will be sure that the sedan waits in the street.'"

"Just so," rejoined Passepoil.

"Yes," said the Gascon, scratching his ear, "but there are two sedans; what do you think of that?"

"Abundance harms not," decided Passepoil. "I have never been in a sedan."

"Nor I; we will ride in it by turns, returning to the palace. Thirdly: 'You will get into the house,'"

"Why, here we are."

"In the house there is a young girl."

"Ah!" cried Passepoil, sentimentally.

"My friend," cried Cocardasse, sententiously, "every one has little weaknesses, but if you talk any more romance, I'll cut your ears off."

"You would not let me see if the young girl is there."

"She is there safe enough; can't you hear?"

A joyous laugh came from the next room.

"You will take the young girl," went on Cocardasse, reciting his lesson, "or, rather, you will politely beg her to get into the sedan, and have her conducted to the pavilion."

"That is it; and I think fifty pistoles each will pay us well for our trouble."

The noise in the next room increased.

The two comrades started at the sound of a sharp, cracked voice behind them, saying:

"Now is the time!" Both turned round quickly; the Little Hunchback was close to the table undoing their parcels; he held out a suit of livery to Cocardasse, another to Passepoil, saying impetuously, though in a low voice: "Make haste."

They hesitated; the Gascon especially repudiated the putting on a footman's dress.

"Capedebion!" he cried; "what is it to you?"

"Hush!" whispered the Hunchback; "make haste."

Pepita's voice was now heard, saying:

"Now you are quite ready, and only want a sedan."

"Make haste," repeated impetuously the little man, who at the same moment extinguished the lamp.

The door of Blanche's room opened, throwing a glimmer of light over the dining-room. Cocardasse and Passepoil retired under the stairs, to make their toilet with all speed. The Hunchback opened one of the windows, and ordered one of the sedans to be brought up to the door. The two ladies'-maids now passed through the room, the Hunchback opening the door for them.

"Are you ready?" he whispered to the two swordsmen.

"Yes," answered both.

"Then to your task."

Pepita came from the next room, saying: "I must find a chair, the gallant demon has forgotten that." The Hunchback shut the door quickly behind her; she heard movements near her, and called out: "Blanche open the door! light me!"

Charming Pepita, fearless as she was of men, had a great dread of ghosts; she tried to return, but two rough, hairy hands prevented her; she tried to scream, but fear choked her voice; she rushed to the other door, where two hands, less hairy but still rough, stopped her again. She cried out, but the noise in the street, which had been redoubled by the approach of Mr. Law, prevented her screams from reaching Blanche who, like a true coquette, was admiring herself before the glass.

Hedged in by Cocardasse and Passepoil, poor Pepita could only escape by the street-door, which opened suddenly; a man on the outside threw a cloak over her head, and put her into the sedan, overcome with fright.

"To the villa behind the Church Magloire," ordered Cocardasse.

The sedan disappeared.

The friends came back, Passepoil murmuring:

"How lovely she is! What a happy man is Gonzagues!"

"Capedebion!" cried the Gascon, "I hope we managed that business to a T."

"What a sweet little hand she has!" rejoined the Norman, "and her waist!"

"The fifty piastoles are ours. Oh, it's all

right when there is no Lagardère in the case;" and he looked around, as if not fully assured of what he advanced. "Now let us set the old woman and the boy at liberty," and he approached the kitchen, when the voice of the Hunchback stopped him.

"Never mind that," he said. "I am pretty well satisfied with you, my fine fel-lows; but your work is not over yet."

"What a sharp voice he has!" grumbled Cocardasse; "but it strikes me I have heard it somewhere."

The Hunchback relighted the lamp.

"What else have we to do, Master Aesop?" asked the Gascon; "that is your name, I think?"

"Aesop, Jonas, and some others. But pay attention to my orders."

"Salute his excellency, Passepoil. Orders, indeed!"

He bowed low; Passepoil did the same, saying, with mock deference:

"We wait his excellency's commands."

"And you do well," said the Hunchback, drily.

He took down two lanterns, such as were carried of a night before sedan-chairs, and lighting them, presented one to each.

"What is this for?" asked Cocardasse angrily; "we could not overtake the chair."

The Hunchback insisted; they each of them took a lantern.

The Hunchback pointed to the bedroom,

"There is a young lady there, who is finishing dressing."

"Another?" cried both. "The second sedan!"

"She will come forth. You are to address her openly and respectfully, and say: 'We are here to conduct you to a ball at the palace!'"

"There was not a word of that in our instructions," observed Passepoil.

"And will the young lady believe us?" asked his friend.

"She will believe you if you tell her who sent you."

"The Prince Gonzagues?"

"No! And add that your master will expect her at twelve precisely—remember that—in the palace gardens, by the statue of Diana."

"Have we, then, two masters? Par-dieu!" cried Cocardasse.

"No, you have but one," answered the Hunchback, calmly; "but his name is not Gonzagues."

"And pray what is his name?" interrupted the Gascon—"up the second!"

"Called Jonas," muttered the Norman.

The hunchback who had mounted the stairs, looked at them sternly, and saying "Your master is called Henri Lagardère, and take care you do your duty!" he disappeared.

"Oh, gracious!" murmured Passepoil; "we have seen a ghost! Let us do our duty, noble friend."

"Capedebion!" rejoined Cocardasse; "no more tricks. Do you know, I thought I recognised—"

"What! the Little Parisian?"

"No; the young lady we put into the sedan. She is the same I saw on his arm in Spain."

Passepoil uttered a cry—Blanche's door was opened.

"Oh! the young lady I saw in Flanders!"

Both comrades were awe-stricken and lost in admiration, as Blanche came forward saying :

"Flora! where are you? Has the giddy girl gone without me?"

Cocardasse and Passepoil, intent on their duty, approached, lantern in hand, bowing low, saying :

"Without you."

Blanche gave her fan to Passepoil, her nosegay to Cocardasse. One would have thought she had footmen all her life.

"I am ready," she said; "let us go. Did he say where I was to meet him?"

"By the statue of Diana," murmured Cocardasse, softly.

"At midnight," added Passepoil.

They set off, Cocardasse and Passepoil preceding the sedan, lantern in hand.

A few minutes later, a little man in black came down from Lagardère's apartment, and crossed the street St. Honore. The crowd made game of his hump; but, paying not the slightest attention to their jeers, he passed round the Palais Royal, and entered the Court of Fountains. In the Street De Valois was a small door, which gave access to the Duke of Orleans' private apartments. It was here that the Regent transacted business. The hunchback gave a particular knock; the door was instantly opened, and a harsh voice called out:

"Is that you, Hunchy? Go up at once—you are expected."

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE TENTS.

STONES have their destinies. Walls last long, and see many generations pass away. How many histories they might disclose! How many dramas, tragedies, and comedies in real life, have been acted within them—little events and great ones, smiles and tears.

A tragedy founded the Palais Royal. Armand Duplessis, Cardinal Richelieu, a famous statesman and infamous poet, purchased the ancient mansions of Ramouillet and Mercoeur, and gave orders to Lemercier to build him a palace worthy of his high fortunes. The castle of Sillery was sacrificed to make a space in front of the noble entrance, over which were the armorial bearings of the Duplessis, crowned by a cardinal's hat; and a fine road was made to enable his eminence to visit in his carriage his farm of Grange Batelière.

The street retains its name of Richelieu, but his palace, at his death, took the still higher title of the Royal Palace.

How this formidable priest loved theatres! He built three, though one might have quite sufficed to represent his dear tragedy, the idolised offspring of his own muse.

Mirame was acted before three thousand of the nobility, who applauded the powerful poet who had brought about the death of the Constable Montmorency. The next day, there was a perfect shower of madrigals and verses of all kinds in honor of the statesman-poet; and then the cowardly applause was hushed, and a young poet was talked about. His name was Corneille.

Richelieu, while following the tyrannic policy of Tarquin, and systematically cutting off heads that dared to raise themselves above the crowd, occupied himself with the decorations and costumes of his three theatres. To him is given the honor of inventing the mimic water, the gauze clouds, and other triumphs of the scenic art; and it is said that he thought more of these lesser talents, including that of dressing, than of his political renown.

Nero prided himself on his talent on the flute.

Anne of Austria, and her son, Louis XIV., took possession of the Cardinal's palace, much in the same manner that Henry VIII. appropriated Hampton Court.

Mazarin, Richelieu's successor, heard under the windows of the still new palace the fierce cries of the Fronde and the murmurs of the discontented populace, and he trembled. He had the east wing of the building, that was afterwards inhabited by the Regent, Duke of Orleans, whose wife, Henrietta of England, held a brilliant court there.

Under this regency, the mournful ghost of *Mirame* might have blushed at the famous little suppers of the Duke, to which, as St. Simon says, very queer company was admitted—ladies of little virtue, gentlemen of less, but noted for their wit and debauchery. But St. Simon loved not the Regent. If history cannot hide the much-to-be-regretted weaknesses of this prince, at least it discloses noble qualities, that even his excesses failed to stifle. Perhaps he might have been a great man, had it not been for the examples and counsels that poisoned his youth.

The garden of the Palais Royal was in those days far more extensive than it is at present. Then, long rows of trees, cut into the shapes of Italian porticos, surrounded the bowers, the flower-gardens, and buildings. The splendid row of chestnut-trees, planted by the Cardinal-poet, and the last of which—the tree of Cracow—existed at the beginning of the present century, was in full beauty. Two avenues of beeches bordered the other sides. In the centre was a semicircle, enclosing a fountain; on the right and left towards the palace, were the circles of Mercury and Diana. Behind the fountain was a hedge of linden-trees, between two large grass-plots.

The eastern wing of the palace was terminated by a gable-end, which had five windows towards the garden. These windows looked towards the circle of Diana. The Regent's rooms were here. The palace, properly so called, besides the state apartments, contained those of the Princess Palatine, Duchess-dowager of Orleans, those of the Duchess of Orleans, the Regent's wife, and those of the Duke of Chartres. The garden was not at this time open to the public, and was, as all writers agree, a most delightful place—in which our ancestors had greatly the advantage over us, as no one could call delightful the present large square, bordered by sickly elms, and crowded by nurses and children.

Our Palais Royal is a fine court, but

nothing of a garden. This night it was an enchantment—a fairy palace. The Regent, who had not much taste for display, contrary to his custom, had ordered magnificent preparations. True, it was said that good Mr. Law paid for the *fête*; but what did it matter? How many people think the result is everything! If Mr. Law paid the fiddlers on his own account, he understood publicity well, and deserved to live in our days, when the writer buys up the fourteen first editions of his own work, and thus succeeds in puffing off the fifteenth; when a dentist, to gain a thousand pounds, spends five hundred in advertisements; and a manager puts three or four hundred humble friends in his theatre, to prove to half that number of true visitors that enthusiasm is not dead in France. The *fête* was his, and its aim and end was to do honor to his system and himself. To throw powder into dazzled eyes, one must throw it from above. Mr. Law sought a pedestal from which he could throw his.

We shall not speak of the saloons, decorated with unheard-of luxury. The *fête* was especially in the garden, notwithstanding the season. It was entirely under cover, and its general decoration represented an encampment in Louisiana, on the bank of the Mississippi—that golden river. All the bethouses in Paris had been laid under contribution for exotic shrubs, tropical flowers, and fruits of this terrestrial paradise. The lamps that hung in profusion from the trees and columns were Indian lanterns, only the Indian tents that were scattered about were voted too pretty. But Law's friends went about saying, "You have no idea how civilised the aborigines have become."

The rather fantastic style of the tents being allowed for, everything else was perfection. There were distant views, forests of canvas, terrible-looking pasteboard mountains, and cascades which foamed like soapsuds. The centre basin was surmounted by an allegorical statue of the Mississippi, bearing a slight resemblance to Mr. Law himself. The river-god held an urn from which flowed a stream of water. In the basin itself was a construction intended to represent the dwellings that the beavers build in the streams of North America. It was around this statue of the Mississippi that the most famous dancers of the time—La Nivelle, Duperhat, Heroun, etc., besides five hundred of inferior note—were to dance the Indian ballet.

The intimate friends of the Regent had laughed at this—it had amused the Duke also; but no one had made such game of it as Mr. Law himself. The saloons were already crowded; Bressac had opened the ball with the Marchioness of Toulouse; the gardens were full, and gambling was going on under all the Indian tents. Notwithstanding the pickets of guards, under the guise of savages, posted at all the doors of the neighboring houses, many a suspicious-looking domino had slipped in.

There was an immense clamour, a moving, joyful crowd, bent on amusement. Still, the kings of the *fête* had not yet appeared—neither the Regent, the Princess, nor Mr. Law. Expectation was at its acme.

In a wigwam of crimson velvet ornamented with gold fringes, where the chiefs of the great river would willingly have smoked the pipe of peace, were several card-tables. This wigwam was near the circle of Diana, almost under the windows of the Regent's apartments. Here a large party had assembled; around a large table covered with network, noisy gaming was going on. Gold was thrown around in handfuls, amid much mirth and laughter. At this table were grouped the handsome little Marquis Chaverry, Choisy, Navailles and others; also Master Peyrolles, who was gaining. It was a habit he had, although his cards were always watched. But under the Regent, cheating at cards, as well as in other things, was considered no great crime. "Fifty louis!" "a hundred!" "two hundred!" "three hundred!" resounded on all sides; also not a few oaths from the losers, mingled with the triumphant laughter of those who had won. Near the tables, of course, all faces were uncovered; while in the walks, on the contrary, there were many masks and dominos.

At a little distance from this noisy group a few old gentlemen were having a quiet game.

"Are you gaming, Chaverry?" said a little blue domino, who put her hooded head into the entrance of the tent.

Chaverry threw the few pieces remaining in his purse on the table.

"Cidalise, nymph of the forest, come to our aid!" cried Gironne.

Another domino appeared behind the first.

"What do you wish?"

"Nothing personal, my dear; we are gambling away forests."

"Well, then?" said the dancer, Debois Dughant, coming in.

Cidalise gave her purse to Gironne.

One of the old gentlemen at the whist-table gave a look of disgust.

"It was not so in our time, Baron Brabanchois," said his neighbor.

"Everything now-a-days, Mr. La Hunaudaye, is spoilt, perverted, abused, degenerated, ruined, polluted!"

Then they sang in chorus—

"What are we coming to, Baron—what are we coming to?"

The Baron of Brabanchois seized one of the agate buttons on the coat of his friend the Baron of La Hunaudaye, and whispered—

"What are these people?"

"I was going to ask you, sir!"

"Your game, Taranne!" cried out Montaubert.

"Taranne," muttered the Baron of Brabanchois, "is not the name of a man, but of a street."

"Your turn now, Albert."

"Why, that is the name of Henry IV.'s mother!" said the Baron La Hunaudaye. "Where do they fish their names from, I wonder?"

"Where Bichon, the Baroness's spaniel, got his," answered Brabanchois, taking out his snuff-box.

Cidalise, who was passing, imprudently thrust in her two fingers—

"It's very good," said the opera-dancer.

"Madam," returned the baron, gravely, "I do not like mingling, be so good as to accept the box."

Cidalise, no way abashed, took the box, and touched with a caressing air, the chin of the indignant old gentleman. Then she pirouetted away.

"What are we coming to?" repeated Brabanchois, suffocating with rage. "What would the late king say, if he were to know of such things?"

"Lost again, Chaverry—lost again!"

"Never mind; I have got back my estate-Chaneilles."

"His father was a noble soldier," said Brabanchois. "Who does he belong to?"

"To the Prince of Gonzagues."

"Heaven keep us from Italians! Are the German any better?—a Count de Horn broken on the wheel for murder."

"A relation of his Royal highness!—what are we coming to?"

"I tell you, Baron, we shall finish by murders in the street in midday."

"Oh, sir, we have that already. Have you not heard the news? Yesterday a woman murdered near the Temple."

"This morning a clerk of the Treasury taken out of the Seine, at the bridge Notre Dame, for having spoken against that vile Scotchman," said Brabanchois, in a low voice.

"Hush!" cried La Hunaudaye; "that is the eleventh in eight days."

"Oriol! Oriol! to the rescue!" cried all the gamblers.

The stout little stockbroker appeared at the entrance of the tent. He wore a mask, and his costume was grotesquely splendid; his dancing had excited much laughter at the ball."

"How wonderful!" he said; "everybody knows me."

"There are not two Oriols," cried Navillea.

"These ladies find one enough," added Nocé.

"Jealous," cried all, laughing.

"Gentlemen, have you seen Nivelle?" asked Oriol.

"Our poor friend has solicited for eight months in vain the post of buffoon and treasurer to our dear Nivelle," exclaimed Gironne.

"Have you been to the herald's office, Oriol?"

"Have you got your parchments yet?"

"Oriol, have you decided which ancestor you shall send to the Crusades?"

And bursts of laughter arose on all sides. Brabanchois held up his hands.

"To think of gentlemen making a mockery of such sacred things, Baron!" cried his friend. "What are we coming to?"

"Peyrolles," said Oriol, advancing to the table, "I wager you fifty louis, but turn up your sleeves."

"What do you say?" answered Gonzagues' factotum. "I only joke with my equals, my little gentleman."

Chaverry pointed to the footmen on the steps before the palace.

"Those knaves look rather tired there; go and fetch them, Taranne, that honest Master Peyrolles may have some one to joke with."

The factotum turned a deaf ear, and contented himself with gaining Oriol's fifty louis.

"And nothing but paper-money!" said the old Brabanchois.

"Our pensions are also paid in notes, even our rents."

"Gold is getting scarce; I warn you, Baron, some catastrophe is near."

"Yes, my friend, that is certain—the Baroness says so."

"Do you know the news—the grand news?" cried Oriol, in a loud voice.

"No. What is it? what is it?"

"If you guessed a thousand things, you would never hit it."

"Mr. Law has turned Catholic!" cried one; "The Duchess of Berri drinks water!" said another; "The Duke of Maine has accepted an invitation to the Regent's fete!" and a hundred other impossibilities were guessed.

"You are wrong, all wrong, my friends—you will never guess. The Princess of Gonzagues, the inconsolable widow, Artemisa, devoted to eternal mourning—"

At the name of the Princess, the old gentlemen listened attentively.

"Well," continued Oriol, "this Artemisa of modern times has drank up all her tears for Mausoleus, and is here at the ball tonight."

All cried out: "Impossible!"

"I have seen her," persisted Oriol, "sitting with the Princess Palatine. But I have something more extraordinary still."

"What can it be?" cried everyone.

Oriol cleared his throat. It was his turn now.

"I saw—and I am wide awake and in my right senses—I saw, I say, the Prince Gonzagues refused admittance to the Regent."

A dead silence. All around the gaming-table were interested, for all expected their fortunes from Gonzagues.

"What is there surprising in that?" asked Peyrolles; "the affairs of state—"

"At this time of day the Regent is not busy in state affairs."

"Nevertheless, if an ambassador—"

"His Highness was not with an ambassador."

"If some new fancy—"

"His Highness was not with a lady."

General curiosity increased.

"But who was with his Royal Highness?"

"That is what everyone asked," continued Oriol. "Gonzagues himself was not in the best of humors."

"And what was the answer?" asked Navillea.

"All a mystery, gentlemen. The Regent has looked dull ever since he received a certain paper from Spain; and he gave

orders to-day that a person should be admitted whom none of his servants, except Blondeau, ever remember to have seen before—a little man, a hunchback."

"A hunchback!" cried they all; "there is nothing but hunchbacks."

"The Regent shut himself up with him, and Lasaïc, Brissac—even the Duchess of Phalaris herself—found the door closed."

Another silence. Through the opening of the tent could be seen the Regent's windows lighted up. Oriol happened to look in that direction.

"Look, look!" he said; "there they are together still!"

All eyes were turned towards the pavilion. On the white curtains could be seen distinctly the shadow of the Regent. He was walking. Another shadow, indistinctly marked, seemed to accompany him. It was only for an instant—the two shadows had passed the window. As they returned, the Regent's shadow was vague; that of his companion was clearly defined—a hunchback, who gesticulated vehemently.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET INTERVIEW.

THE two shadows were not again visible on the curtains. The Prince had seated himself; the Hunchback stood before him in a respectful yet firm attitude. There were three entrances into the Regent's apartments, one public into the large anteroom, the two others private, one of which was kept by an old lady who had been an opera-singer, the other by Le Breant, who had been groom to the Regent, whose voice we heard at the end of the dark passage when the Hunchback entered by the Court of Fountains.

It was expected the Regent was alone and uneasy.

He was still in his dressing-gown, though the fête had been a long time begun. His hair, which was rich and abundant, was still in curl-papers, and he wore a particular kind of gloves to preserve the whiteness of his hands. His mother, in her Memoirs, says he inherited this excessive care of his person from his father, who was even to latter years as particular as any coquette.

The Regent was about five-and-forty, but looked older from the worn expression of his features. He was handsome, notwithstanding;

his features were noble and engaging, his eyes were of feminine softness, and showed kindness almost to a fault; his figure slightly stooping, except in company. His lips and cheeks had the effeminacy peculiar to the Orleans family. The Princess of Palatine, his mother, had imparted to him some of her German good-humor and ready wit, but she had kept the best part herself.

Upon certain constitutions debauchery leaves few traces. Men of iron may drink with impunity. Louis of Orleans was not of the number, and his face and figure already bore traces of his intemperance, and one could easily prognosticate that death lurked not far distant in a bottle of champagne.

The Hunchback was introduced.

"Was it you who wrote to me from Spain?" asked the Regent, eyeing him from head to foot.

"No, sir," replied the Hunchback, respectfully.

"And from Brussels?"

"No."

"Nor from Paris?"

"Neither."

The Regent looked at him again.

"It struck me as curious you should be Lagardère."

The Hunchback bowed with a deprecating smile.

"I did not allude to what you imagined. I have never seen Lagardère," said the Regent, with kind seriousness.

"Sire," replied the Hunchback, still smiling, "he was called handsome Lagardère when he was in the light cavalry of your royal uncle. I could never have been handsome, or in the light cavalry."

"What is your name?"

"Master Louis, at home; abroad, people like myself have generally a nickname."

"Where do you live?"

"At a distance."

"That is to say, you would rather not tell?"

"Yes, your Highness."

Philip of Orleans looked at him severely.

"I have clever police, who can easily learn."

"As your highness makes a point of knowing, I live in the palace of the Prince Gonzagues."

"In his palace?" repeated the Regent, astonished.

The Hunchback bowed.

"It is a very long time ago that I first

heard Lagardère spoken of," said the Regent, thoughtfully; "he used to be an impudent bully."

"He has done his best to expiate his follies."

"What are you to him?"

"Nothing—yet all: he has no friends."

"Why did he not come himself?"

"Because he could make use of me."

"If I wished to see him, where could I find him?"

"I cannot answer your Highness's question. Nevertheless, you, sir, have a clever police—try."

"Do you say that in defiance?"

"Only, your Royal Highness, as a threat. An hour hence, Lagardère can be out of your reach, and the step he has now taken he will never renew."

"He has taken it now, then, against his will?"

"Yes, sire, unwillingly."

"Why?"

"Because the happiness of his whole life is staked on this step, which he need not have taken."

"And what forced him to take it?"

"An oath."

"Made to whom?"

"To a dying man."

"And this man was called——"

"You knew him well, your Highness.

It was Philip, Duke of Nevers."

The Regent covered his face.

"It is nearly twenty years," he murmured in a mournful tone, "but I have never forgotten him. How dearly I loved him! Since his death, I have never clasped the hand of a true friend."

The Hunchback looked at him with emotion.

The Duke recovered himself, and said, calmly:

"I was a near relation of the Duke of Nevers. As prince and as his cousin, I owe protection to his widow, who is, besides, the wife of one of my dearest friends. If her daughter yet lives, I promise that she shall be a rich heiress, and marry a prince if she likes. In regard to the murder of my poor Philip, when I heard of his death, I took an oath to be avenged, and I will keep it, though it is said that I have but one virtue, that of forgetting injuries; and now that I govern the State, vengeance will be no more than simple justice."

The Hunchback bowed in silence.

The Duke continued—

"There are still several things that I wish to learn. How is it that Lagardère was so long before he addressed himself to me?"

"Because he wished, before he gave up his guardianship, that his ward should be grown up, and able to know her friends from her foes."

"He has proof of what he states?"

"He has all except one."

"What is that?"

"The proof that could confound the murderer."

"Then he knows the murderer?"

"He believes he knows him; he has a mark by which he could verify his suspicions."

"And this mark would be proof?"

"Your highness shall judge shortly. In regard to the birth and identity of the young lady, all is complete."

The Regent considered a moment, then said—

"What oath had Lagardère taken?"

"To be a father to the child."

"Then he must have been present at her father's death?"

"He was. Never in his last moments, confided to him the guardianship of his child."

"Did Lagardère draw his sword to defend Nevers?"

"He did what he could. After the Duke's death he carried off the child, though twenty swords were against him."

"I know that he is a famous swordsman; but your answers are very mysterious. How can it be, as you say, that he only suspects the murderer?"

"It was a dark night, and he was masked; he struck from behind."

"Then it was the master himself who dealt the death-blow?"

"It was the master; the Duke fell, crying out to him — 'Friend, avenge my death!'"

"It was not, then, the Marquis of Caylus?"

"The Marquis has been dead many years," replied the Hunchback; "Nevers' assassin still lives. Your Highness has only to say the word, and Lagardère promises to show him to you to-night."

"Then," said the Regent, "Lagardère is in Paris."

The Hunchback bit his lip.

"If he is in Paris, be is mine!"

He rang. "Desire Monsieur Machault to come to me at once."

The Hunchback recovered himself, and said, looking at his watch—

"Sire, Lagardère is now waiting for me outside of Paris; where, I will not say, if you put me on the rack. It is now eleven; if he does not receive a message from me in half-an-hour, he will set off for the frontiers—your police will not be able to catch him."

"You shall be hostage for him," cried the Regent.

"Oh! as regards me, sire," said the Hunchback, smiling, "if you desire to keep me prisoner, I am in your power," and he crossed his arms over his bosom.

The superintendent of police entered. He was dimsighted, and not observing the Hunchback, began before he was questioned—

"There is something new, your Royal Highness; you can no longer show clemency in the case. I hold the proof of their secret concert with Alberoni. There are Cellamare, Villeroi, Villars, all in the plot with the Duke and Duchess of Maine."

"Silence!" cried the Regent, who did not speak for several minutes, but secretly observed the Hunchback, who stood firm and composed. "Machault," he said at last, "it was precisely about Cellamare and the others that I wished to speak to you. Wait for me, if you please, in the next room."

Machault looked through his glass with evident curiosity at the Hunchback: as he left the room, the Duke added—

"I request you to send me a pass, ready sealed and signed."

The superintendent again examined the Hunchback."

The Prince could no longer keep serious.

"Why do they put blind men at the head of the police?" he said; then added, "This Lagardère makes treaties with me; he has probably some interested motive in view."

"Your Highness is mistaken; Lagardère requires nothing; it would not be in the power even of the Regent of France to reward him."

"Indeed!" said the Duke. "We really must see this romantic personage; he will have famous success at court, and set the fashion again of knight-errantry. How long shall we have to wait?"

"Two hours."

"All the better; he will form an interlude between the Indian ballet and the supper, though he is not in the programme."

A servant entered, bringing the pass signed by the Minister Le Blanc and Maclaville.

The Regent himself filled up the paper.

"Monsieur de Lagardère," he said, "has not committed unpardonable crimes. The late King was severe upon duelling, and he was right. But, fortunately, manners have altered since then, and swords keep better in their scabbards now. Lagardère's pardon shall be registered to-morrow, and here is his safe conduct. You will warn your friend that any violence on his part will cancel the efficacy of this parchment."

"The time of violence is past," said the Hunchback, solemnly.

"What do you mean?"

"That two days since, Lagardère could not have accepted this clause."

"Wherefore?" said the Duke, hastily.

"Because he had sworn to avenge Nevers."

"Go on," said the Regent.

"Lagardère," said the Hunchback, slowly, "when he carried off the child, said to the murderers: 'You shall all die by my hand.' He knew seven of them—those are dead."

"By his hand?" said the Duke, turning pale.

The Hunchback bowed.

"And the two others?" asked the Regent.

The Hunchback paused, then replied:

"There are some heads so high, your Highness, that kings and governors do not like them to fall on the scaffold. The noise of their fall shakes the State. Lagardère gives your highness the choice, he desired me to tell you so. The eighth murderer is only a servant, the ninth is the master—that man must die. If your Highness object to the headsman, let this man and Lagardère draw their swords on each other."

"The cause is just," said the Regent, offering the parchment. "I do this in memory of my dear Philip, and if Lagardère needs help——"

"Lagardère," answered the Hunchback, "desires only one thing from your Highness."

"What is that?"

"Secrecy—one word might be fatal."

"I shall be mute."

The Hunchback bowed profoundly, and withdrew.

"Did you get what you wanted, little friend?" said Le Breant, when he saw him return.

"Yes; but now I want to see the fête," and he slid a louis into his hand.

"My goodness, what a famous dancer!" cried the other.

"Moreover," said the Hunchback, "I want the key of your lodge in the garden," and he slid a double louis into his hand.

"What strange fancies the little fellow has! Here is the key."

"And I want you, besides, to carry into your lodge the parcel that I left with you this morning."

"And will there be another double louis for that?"

"Yes, two."

"Bravo! what a generous little fellow! It must be for an assignation."

"Perhaps," answered the Hunchback, smiling.

"If I were a woman, I should love you in spite of your hump, you are so generous. But," said the old man, "you must have a card to get in; those guards on duty don't understand a joke."

"I have mine in my pocket; only bring me the parcel."

"Directly, my little friend. Take that passage, turn to the right, the landing is lighted, and go down the steps. Amuse yourself, and good luck to you."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GAME OF CARDS.

In the garden the crowd was still increasing. It was especially great near the statue of Diana, which bordered on the Prince Regent's own apartments. Everyone wished to know why he kept people waiting. We will not waste much time on conspiracies. The intrigues of the Duke and Duchess of Maine, of Villeroi, and the Spanish embassy, though fertile in dramatic incidents, belong not to our story. It is sufficient to remark in passing, that the Regent was surrounded with enemies. The Parliament both hated and despised him; the clergy were generally hostile to him; the old generals of the army felt only disdain for his good-humored policy; and even from certain members of his own council he met with continual opposition.

Still, one must allow that the financial display of late had been of immense advantage in turning away from him general animulversion. Personally, none but Ma-

dame de Montespan's children, whom Louis XIV. had legitimatised, could have any strong feeling against a prince of the neuter gender, who had not a grain of wickedness in his disposition, but whose kindness bordered upon indifference. One only detests those for whom one might have felt a strong affection. Philip of Orleans had many boon companions, but no friends. Law's bank bought the favor of princes. It is a hard word to say, but history confirms the fact. The prince once bought, the Duke followed, and Madame de Montespan's children, who had been legitimatised, remained alone. Among the number of writers who condemn, probably on too just grounds, the Regent, Duclerc, in his secret memoirs, speaks of him with the greatest partiality, and it is evidently his opinion that the Duke could never have kept his position had it not been for Law's bank.

The young King Louis XV. was adored. His education was confided to people who were hostile to the Regent; for even the indifferent public trusted little to the probity of the Duke, and feared that the great-grandchild of Louis XIV. might die prematurely, as his father and grandfather had done.

At first the Duke of Orleans treated all attacks against him with carelessness and disdain. Soft earth makes the best resistance to cannon, and a mattress a better defence than a metal shield. The Duke slept behind his mattress. When he was forced to show himself, he did so; and there being little courage or firmness among his enemies, his presence alone intimidated them.

At this stage of our story the Regent still remained quiet, though clamors were heard on all sides against him, even under his window and in his own palace; and it is true he gave but too much cause for scandal. His private life was detestable. Under his government, France was a large dismantled ship towed by another vessel. That other vessel was England.

If this night, in the gardens of the Palais Royal, there was some enthusiasm, founded on the apparent success of Law's bank, still there was much discontent among politicians, financiers, moralists, and old people. In this last class, composed of those who had been young and brilliant under Louis XIV., were the Barons of La Hunaudaye and Brabantois, who consoled themselves with the reflection that in their day ladies

were more beautiful, men more witty, the sky of a finer blue, the wind less cold, wine far better, servants more faithful, and chimneys less given to smoking. Still at this *sets* the gay, brilliant cloud thought little of politics. The grand people were now beginning to assemble. The Duke of Bourbon led in the Princess of Conti, the Chancellor d'Aguesseau the Princess Palatine, and the Abbé Dubois was paying his court to the English ambassador, Lord Stair.

A rumor now arose, which for a moment caused to be forgotten even the delay of the Regent and the absence of Mr. Law himself. It was the arrival of Peter the Great of Russia, under the charge of the Fieldmarshal Tessé and a guard of thirty men, who were charged never to leave him. No easy task, as the Muscovite Emperor's movements were rapid and his freaks sudden. He had come to France to learn the art of government and other things.

The Regent, who no doubt would fain have avoided this terrible visit, yet treated his imperial guest with splendid courtesy. But Parisian curiosity, highly excited by the arrival of the barbarous monarch, had not yet had time to appease itself, for the Czar brooked no interference, and when the people crowded round his palace, ordered the guard to charge them. The poor field marshal would rather have made ten campaigns than undertake such a charge. The Regent had wished to dazzle the Czar by the magnificence of his hospitality, but the Czar would not be dazzled. In the splendid bedroom that had been prepared for him he ordered a camp bedstead to be brought, and slept thereon. He entered the shops and talked familiarly with the people; but he was incognito, and Parisian curiosity was at fault. The privileged few who had seen him said that he was tall, well made, rather thin, dark, with large vivacious eyes, piercing and sometime savage. Occasionally a nervous convulsion passed over his features, entirely altering their expression. This peculiarity was attributed to the poison that the groom-in-waiting, Zoubow, had given him in his childhood. When he chose it, it is said, his deportment was gracious, even agreeable.

When it was known that the Czar was at the ball, there was great crowding to get sight of him; but this excitement little troubled our gamblers under the Indian tent; not one had given up gold, and bank-

notes continued to change hands. Peyrolles held a splendid hand, and also the pool. Chaverry, rather pale, still tried to laugh.

"Ten thousand crowns!" cried out Peyrolles.

"I accept," answered Chaverry.

"With what?" asked Navales.

"On my note of hand."

"This is not the way to play at the Regent's," said the Duke of Tresmes; and then be added, disdainfully "this place is a regular gambling-house!"

"On which you have no tithe, Duke," answered Chaverry with a bow.

A general laugh arose at the expense of Monsieur de Tresmes, who being governor of Paris, had a tenth of the profits on all gambling-houses, and was said to hold one himself—nothing derogatory at that time, when the palace of the Princess Carignan was said to be the most dangerous hell in Paris.

"Ten thousand crowns!" repeated Peyrolles.

"I take it," cried a rough voice in the crowd, and a shower of notes fell on the table. No one knew the voice, and everyone turned to look at the speaker. He was a bold, tall fellow, with a round unpowdered wig, and plain linen collar and ruffles. His dress contrasted strangely with the rich elegance of his neighbors. He wore a doublet of thick maroon cloth, with grey trousers, and large clumsy boots of greasy leather. Around his waist was a band which held a seaman's cutlass. He looked a true corsair.

In one deal Peyrolles had won the ten thousand crowns.

"Double!" cried the stranger.

A fresh shower of notes. Some corsairs have heavy purses.

Peyrolles again won.

"Double!" cried his antagonist, angrily. Peyrolles accepted, and was again successful.

"Double!" still called out the corsair.

"You must be very rich, sir," said Peyrolles.

The man with the cutlass answered not, but threw the money on the table.

"Peyrolles has won again!" cried all around.

"Double still!" persisted the stranger.

"Bravo!" cried Chaverry; "he is a bold player."

The stranger unceremoniously thrust aside those near him, and placed himself at

the table close to Peyrolles. The factotum was again successful.

"Enough!" cried the man with the cutlass; and added, coldly: "Make way there!" at the same moment drawing his sword and seizing Peyrolles by the ear.

"What are you about?" cried all around.

"Don't you perceive," replied the stranger, coolly, "the man is a knave?"

Peyrolles tried to draw his sword. He was as pale as death.

The man with the cutlass was no trifler, and knew how to use his weapon. A well-executed and rapid thrust made the spectators draw back. A sharp, well-directed blow broke Peyrolles' sword in two.

"If you stir, I'll not answer for your life; if you are still, I shall only cut your ears off."

Peyrolles uttered stifled cries, and offered to give back the money. A crowd encompassed the two men. The stranger, using his weapon as a razor, was about calmly to begin the surgical operation, when a great tumult was heard at the entrance of the tent.

The Prince Kourakine, Russian Ambassador at the French Court, rushed impetuously into the tent, his face bathed in perspiration, his hair and clothes in disorder. Behind him, Field-marshal Tessé, followed by his thirty guards.

"Your Highness, stop—in Heaven's name, stop!" cried out the General and the Prince at once.

The stranger turned calmly round, while the General threw himself between him and his victim; but he did not touch him; he only bowed profoundly.

Then people were aware that the tall fellow with the maroon doublet was no other than the Emperor of Russia.

He slightly knit his brow, and said to Tessé:

"What do you want with me? I am only doing justice."

Prince Kourakine whispered a few words in his ear. He let go of Peyrolles, slightly reddened, and said, with a smile—

"You are right—I am not at home here. I had forgotten."

He saluted with his hand the wonderstruck crowd, with a haughty grace that did not sit ill upon him, and left the tent, followed by his guards. They were accustomed to his tricks, and passed all their time running after him.

Those not interested in the gambling

followed the Czar, who soon escaped from them, and leaving the palace at once, and jumping into the first carriage he could find, went off to his three bottles at a sitting.

Navaillé took the cards out of Peyrolles' hands, and gently pushed him out of the circle.

"Gentlemen," cried Nocé, arriving in violent haste, "leave your cards; you are playing over a volcano! The chief of police has discovered three dozen conspiracies that would shame Cataline's. The Regent alarmed, has been shut up with a little man in black, to be told his fortune."

"Oh! then the little man in black is a fortune-teller?"

"Yes, indeed. He predicted to the Regent that Mr. Law would be drowned in the Mississippi, and that the Duchess de Berri would marry that fool Riom."

"Hush, hush!" cried the most prudent. The others laughed.

"Oh! everybody talks of it," continued Nocé. "And the little black man also predicted that Dubois would be made a cardinal."

"A likely thing!" said Peyrolles.

"And that Master Peyrolles," added Nocé, "would become an honest man before he dies."

An explosion of laughter. Everyone left the table, and crowded to the entrance of the tent; for Nocé had cried out:

"Look! look!—the little man himself!"

Everyone saw him slowly descend the steps of the pavilion. The guards stopped him at the bottom. The little Hunchback showed his card, and passed on.

CHAPTER XV.

SOUVENIRS OF THREE PHILIPS.

THE Hunchback had an eyeglass in his hand, and looked at the decorations of the sets like a true amateur. He bowed with much politeness to the ladies, and seemed to chuckle to himself. He had on a black velvet mask. As he advanced, our gambler eyed him with great attention; but the one who observed him especially was Peyrolles.

"What an oddity it is!" cried Chaverny. "But it looks like—"

"Who?" said Oriol, who was short-sighted.

"Oh, the man of ten thousand crowns, who took the dog's corner."

"Impossible!" cried Orléan. "Such a fellow with the Regent!"

The little man continued to advance. He looked through his glass, he smiled, he bowed. Never was a more polite or better-tempered hunchback. As he drew nearer, they could hear him muttering to himself:

"Charming! delightful! No one but his Royal Highness could do such things. Ah! I am pleased to have seen all this—very pleased."

In the interior of the tent voices were heard. Another party had taken the places of our gamblers. These latter were older, graver, and of higher title. One of them said :

"What has happened, I know not; but I have just seen Bonnivet, who was doubling the patrol by the Regent's order."

"And the Regent is not to be spoken to?"

"Machault is gone distracted."

"The Prince Gonzagues himself could not get a word from him."

Our gamblers continued to listen, but the new-comers lowered their voices.

"Something is going to happen," cried Chaverry; "I have a presentiment."

"Ask the fortune-teller," said Nocé.

The little man bowed amiably, and asked :

"What, something going to happen—something extraordinary? He! he! he!" and giving to his cracked voice an almost unearthly tone, he continued: "I am come from a very hot place, gentlemen; I shiver with cold. Pray allow me to enter the tent."

There was a slight shudder. All eyes were fixed on the Hunchback, who slid into the tent with many bows. When he saw the nobleman now seated round the table, he shook his head, and said with a pleased air:

"Yes, something is wrong. The Regent looks anxious, the guard is doubled. But no one knows what it is—not the Governor of Paris—not even the Superintendent of Police. Do you know, Count de Rohan? Or you, Baron de Senneterre?"

No one answered. Both gentlemen took off their masks. This removal of the mask was always intended as the most polite manner of requesting a stranger to unmask.

The Hunchback bowed, and laughingly said:

"Gentlemen it would be useless—you have never seen me. Gentlemen, you might guess for ever, but you could never find out. It has nothing to do with the affairs that occupy your public interests or your private thoughts. It concerns not the secret machinations of Spain, or the troubles of France—neither the ill humor of the Parliament, or the eclipses that Mr. Law has so much faith in. Nevertheless, the Regent is anxious—the guard is doubled."

"What is it about, then, Monsieur Mask?" asked the Count de Rohan.

The Hunchback paused a moment, then answered :

"Do you believe in ghosts? Of winter evenings, in an old hall of an ancient castle when the windows rattle in the storm, and the heavy old panelings and dark gilt frames absorb the light from the large, old-fashioned hearth, it is easy to scare people. The castle itself has, without doubt, some mysterious, awful legend connected with it. Everyone knows that along such a passage the old count, dead a hundred years ago, still drags his chain, and enters such a chamber as the clock strikes twelve, and sits shivering by the fireless hearth. But here, in the Palais Royal, under the Indian tent, in the midst of the *fête* of Mammon, gaiety and laughter, close to the gambling-table—is this a place for those vague terrors that sometimes seize upon the bravest, the strongest minds?"

Nevertheless, a cold shiver was felt by all who heard that cracked, shrill voice, notwithstanding the joyous buzz of the gardens, the brilliant lights, and the soft harmony that filled the air.

"He! he?" continued the Hunchback, "who believes in ghosts at noon and in the street? But at midnight, in the solitary chamber, especially if the night-light be gone out! There is a flower that opens in the night—conscience is that flower of the stars. Do not alarm yourselves, gentlemen—I am not a ghost."

"Will you be so good as to explain yourself—yes or no, Beau Mask?" said the Duke de Rohan, rising.

"We are neither of us handsome, Duke, so a truce to compliments. He! he! This belongs to another world—a dead man, who after twenty years reveals the mysteries of the tomb. He was a gallant gentleman, a noble prince, young, brave, rich, happy, beloved—an angel's face, with the figure of a hero."

"Whom can he mean?" cried Chaverry.

"I do not address you, Marquis," replied the little man; "you are too young to know anything of events that happened twenty years ago. I speak to men with grey hairs—to you, Count La Hunaudaye, who would have now been lying in your grave in Flanders, had he not cleft the skull of the soldier who was upon you!"

The old Baron was too much astonished to say a word.

"I address you, Count Marnillac, whose daughter took the veil on his account. You, Duke de Rohan, who on his arrival had your castle of Senneterre barricaded. You, Monsieur Vauguyon, who cannot have forgotten that cut on the right shoulder."

"Never!" cried twenty voices at once.

The Hunchback took off his hat, and pronounced solemnly:

"Yes, Philip of Lorraine, Duke of Nevers, assassinated under the walls of the castle of Caylus, on the 21st of November, 1697."

"Stabbed from behind, as it is said," murmured Monsieur de Vauguyon.

"In ambush," added La Ferté.

"And if I am not mistaken," said the Duke de Rohan, "the Marquis of Caylus, the father of the Princess Gonzagues, was suspected."

"I have heard my father mention that," said Navailles.

"My father was the Duke of Nevers' intimate friend," added Chaverry.

Peyrolles listened, but tried to elude observation.

The Hunchback continued, in a severe tone:

"Stabbed in a most cowardly manner from behind, in ambush—that is all true; but the murderer was not the Marquis of Caylus."

"Who was it, then?" asked many voices.

But the little man answered not. He continued, in his sneering tone:

"It made a great noise at the time, gentlemen. For a week nothing else was spoken of; but by the end of a month, the name of Nevers was almost forgotten."

"His Royal Highness—" interrupted the Duke de Rohan.

"Yes, his Royal Highness, one of the three Philips, did all he could to avenge his best friend. But what could he do? The castle of Caylus is so far off. That dreadful night kept the fearful secret. Of

course, the Prince Gonzagues—But is there not here a worthy dependent of the prince, named Peyrolles?"

Oriol and Nocé stood aside to allow the disconcerted Peyrolles to be seen.

"I was going to add," continued the Hunchback, "that of course the Prince Gonzagues, also one of the three Philips, moved heaven and earth to avenge his friend. Still all was useless. No proof—not the slightest clue. So, perchance, it was left to time, or rather to Heaven, to discover the murderer."

Peyrolles had but one desire—to slip away to warn Gonzagues; still he remained, to see how far the Hunchback would carry his audacity. On hearing the events of that night again brought forward, Peyrolles felt as if he were being strangled.

The Hunchback was right. The Court has no memory. A man dead for twenty years is twenty times forgotten. Still this was an exceptional case, and to see the interest awakened in every countenance, one might have fancied the murder had been committed only yesterday. Had it been the desire of the little man to reawaken an interest in this sad and mysterious drama, he had succeeded perfectly.

"He! he!" he cried, giving a piercing and rapid glance around; "trust to Heaven as a last resource. Yes, many wise men have done so. In Heaven there are better eyes than those of the police. Heaven is patient. Sometimes days, months, years pass; but when the time comes—"

He stopped. His voice vibrated strangely, and the menace implied in his sharp words was felt by each of his hearers, as if directed against himself. One alone was guilty—Peyrolles—yet all Gonzagues' allies, though too young to have even been suspected, trembled.

"When the hour is come," continued the Hunchback—"and come it will, sooner or later—a man, like a messenger from the tomb, comes. If he is strong, he strikes; if his arm, like mine, is too weak to hold the sword, he creeps, he crawls, until his humble voice can reach the ear of princes; then, at the given hour, the avenger hears the name of the assassin."

"What name?" asked the Duke of Rohan.

"Do we know him?" cried Chaverry and Navailles.

The Hunchback seemed excited by his own words.

"What matters it if you know him or

not? The name of the assassin would astound you. But even now a voice as if from the clouds has said: 'Prince, in that gilded crowd is the assassin; he sat at your table yesterday, perhaps he will sit there again to-morrow. Prince, every night and morning the assassin offers you his bloody hand,' and the Prince said: 'By Heaven, justice shall be done!'

It was strange, but all the most distinguished nobles looked distrustfully at each other.

"This is the reason, gentlemen," continued the sharp voice of the Hunchback, "that the Regent of France looks sad tonight, and the guard is doubled."

He bowed, as if about to leave.

"But the name?" cried out Chaverny.

"Don't you see the fool has only been laughing at you?" said Peyrolles.

The Hunchback stopped at the entrance of the tent, and looked at his hearers through his glass.

"Ho! ho!" he cried, coming back; "you all look askance at each other, as if each thought his neighbor the murderer. Touching effect of mutual esteem! Gentlemen, the times are changed; it is no longer in fashion, thank Heaven! Assassins are rare at court. Don't be uneasy; the assassin is not here. We don't kill now-a-days with such brutal arms as pistols and swords; we ruin a man—we kill him by inches." And turning to the young men, he said: "Why, what long faces you all have! Let us talk no more of horribile things. Comedy is in fashion now. Mine is a good-humored ghost, who is interested in present as well as past events; therefore he has come to the fête, and with his finger will point out to the Regent the clever men who cheat at the famous game of lansquenet, in which Mr. Law holds the bank—to point out to him the jugglers on the Stock Exchange, the mountebanks of the street Quincampoix. The Regent is a good, easy prince, but easily prejudiced. Still, if he knew everything, he would be ashamed."

Some of the hearers left.

"That is the fact," assented the Duke de Rohan, graciously.

"Bravo!" applauded the Barons or banchois and La Hunauday.

"Is it so, gentlemen?" continued the little man, "Truths are best spoken in jest. These youngsters don't like my plain words—noble youths, whose nobility is just a little faded, mix with the unwashed vulgar like diverse colors in the same

woof of cloth. Don't be angry, masters, we are at a masked ball; some *fêtes* have no to-morrow, and I am only a poor Hunchback."

Chaverny took Navailles' arm.

"Let us be off," he said.

The old nobles laughed heartily.

"And then," continued the Hunchback, "having pointed out to the Regent the tricksters and jugglers, and whole army of mountebanks of the Gonzagues palace—I would point out to the Regent disappointed ambition, envenomed rancour, envious caballers, grey-headed fools, who would bring back the miseries of the Fronde, adherents of the Duchess of Maine, odious conspirators, who would willingly drag their country into an ominous war only to satisfy their own ambition."

The Hunchback had not one listener left. He gave an inward chuckle, and drew a parchment from his pocket sealed with the Royal seal, and sat down to read it quietly at the now empty gambling-table. At the top of the parchment were these words: "Louis, by the grace of God King of France and Navarre," at the bottom was the signature of the Regent, the Secretary of State, and Superintendent of Police.

"This is famous!" cried the little man, after having read it through; "now for the first time for eighteen years, Lagardère can hold his head up, look people in the face, and dare to avow his name."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PINK DOMINOES.

THE parchment contained a pass in form, and gave full permission to the Chevalier Lagardère to go to any part of France under the guarantee of royal authority, and in all security to leave the country whenever he chose, and whatever might happen.

"Whatever might happen," repeated the Hunchback again and again; "the Regent may have his faults, still he is a man of his word. Whatever may happen, Lagardère has with him this *carte blanche*. He has begun well; God grant he may bring things to a prosperous issue."

The Indian tent had two entrances. A few steps from the second was a little path which led through a shrubbery to the rustic lodge of Le Bréant. It was lighted up by lamps placed among the foliage. As

the Hunchback left the tent, he saw the whole army of Gonzagues' partisans assembled there after their defeat. They were evidently talking of him, and making a joke of it; only Chaverny was silent. The Hunchback apparently had no time to lose, for he went straight to the Regent, his glass to his eye, and cried out:

"Only the Regent can do such things—delightful, delightful!"

The gamblers moved to let him past.

"Ah! gentlemen." The others fled also. "He! he! the charming freedom of a masked ball!"

All left him except Chaverny, which caused a laugh among his friends.

"Chaverny wishes to have his fortune told," cried Oriol.

"Chaverny has found his master," added Navailles; "some one even more caustic than himself."

The little Marquis stopped the Hunchback, and said—

"Did those words, 'some fêtes may have no to-morrow,' apply personally to me?"

"Personally to you."

"Be so good as to translate them, then."

"Marquis, I have not time."

"If I force you?"

"I defy you. The Marquis de Chaverny killing in single combat the tenant of the Prince of Gonzagues' dog-kennel, would scarcely add to that nobleman's fame."

Chaverny held out his hand to stop him. The Hunchback took it, and pressed it forcibly to his.

"Marquis," he said, in a low voice, "you are better than your deeds. In Spain, where we have both been, I once saw a noble war-horse taken by some Jewish merchants and placed among the baggage mules. It was at Oviedo. When I passed again, the charger was dead. Marquis, you are not in your proper place, and will die young, because it costs you so much to become a knave."

He bowed, and passed on. Chaverny remained deep in thought.

"At last, he is gone!" cried Oriol.

"He is the devil in person," added Navailles. "How thoughtful Chaverny is!"

Music was heard in the ball-rooms; it was an interlude between two minuets. The Prince Gonzagues, tired of waiting in the Prince Regent's ante-room, had entered the ball-rooms: his politeness and ready wit made him a great favorite with the ladies, who thought, even as a poor, petty

noble, Philip Gonzagues an accomplished cavalier. Although he lived in intimacy with the Regent, his manners possessed none of the presumption and arrogance that was then so much in fashion. His demeanor was courteous and reserved. The Duchess of Orleans held him in high esteem, and the good Abbe Dubois, who extended his favor to few, thought him almost a saint. What had passed to-day at Gonzagues' palace had been variously reported. The ladies in general considered Gonzagues' conduct in regard to his wife as superhuman. He was a martyr—eighteen years of patient endurance and gentleness opposed to vigorous disdain. The Princesses were already acquainted with the Prince's very eloquent speech in the family council. The good-natured Prince Palatine had offered him her fat hand; the Duchess of Orleans had paid him a compliment; the beautiful little Abbess of Chelles had spoken kindly to him; and the Duchess of Berry said he was a sublime fool. In respect of the poor Princess Gonzagues, they would have had her stoned for causing the unhappiness of such a worthy man.

Gonzagues, in the midst of his triumph, suddenly saw in the embrasure of a window the long face of Peyrolles, which, never of the gayest, was at this moment a living signal of distress. He looked scared, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Gonzagues called him. Peyrolles approached with trepidation, and whispered a few words in his master's ear. Gonzagues rose quickly, and with a presence of mind that belongs only to knaves on the south side of the Alps, said:

"The Princess de Gonzagues has just entered the ball; I go to meet her."

Even Peyrolles was astonished.

"Where shall I find her?" asked Gonzagues.

Peyrolles assuredly did not know, so he bowed and led the way.

"Some men are really too good!" cried the Princess Palatine, with a pretty Bavarian oath.

The other Princesses looked after him with compassion, and sighed: "Poor fellow!"

"What do you want?" asked Gonzagues, as soon as they were alone.

"The Hunchback is at the ball!" replied the factotum.

"Of course; I know that, for I gave him a card."

"You know nothing of him?"

"How should I know anything?"

"I distrust him."

"Distrust him as much as you like; but is that all?"

"He had an interview of half-an-hour this evening with the Regent."

"The Regent!" repeated the Prince, rather taken aback; but recovering himself, he said: "No doubt, then, he had many things to say to him."

The factotum then related the scene in the Indian tent. When he had ended, Gonzagues laughed disdainfully, and said:

"All hunchbacks have wit, but a wit as distorted as their bodies; they are forever making silly scenes. The fellow who burnt Epheus to make himself famous must have been a hunchback."

"And is that all you think of it?" cried Peyrolles.

"Unless," answered Gonzagues, after a moment's reflection, "the Hunchback desires to sell himself at a high price."

"He is betraying us, Prince," said Peyrolles, with emphasis.

"My poor fellow!" murmured his master; "we shall have trouble yet to make anything of you. Can't you see that the Hunchback is zealous in our interests?"

"No, really, sir, I never guessed that."

"I don't like zeal; the Hunchback shall be checked, but it is certain he gave us a capital idea."

"If the Prince deigned to explain to me?"

They were among the shrubs. Gonzagues took his factotum's arm familiarly.

"Tell me first," he said, "what was done in the street Du Chantre?"

"Your orders were punctually executed; I only returned to the palace after having seen the litter on its way towards Magloire."

"And Donna Cruz—Mademoiselle de Nevers?"

"She must be here."

"You must seek her; the Princesses expect her. I have arranged everything. She will make quite a sensation, and be greatly admired. Now let us talk of the Hunchback. What could he say to the Regent?"

"That is what we do not know."

"He has, or at least I guess that he has, told the Regent that the assassin of Nevers is alive."

"Hush!" involuntarily cried Peyrolles, who trembled from head to foot.

"He has done well," continued Gonzagues, calmly. "Nevers' murderer does exist; what interest have I, the husband of his widow, in concealing it? I should like the whole court to hear me."

Peyrolles was in consternation.

"And since he lives," continued Gonzagues, "by Jove, we will find him!"

He stopped, to look his factotum seriously in the face.

Peyrolles trembled violently, and nervous twitches agitated his face.

"Do you comprehend?" cried his master.

"I comprehend that it is playing with fire, Prince."

"That was the Hunchback's notion," added Gonzagues, lowering his voice; "it is not a bad one, in faith! Only how did he get it? and what right has he to be wider awake than we are? We shall find that out. Those who are so clever are doomed to an early death."

Peyrolles raised his head quickly. At last he could understand.

"Is it to be to-night?" he murmured.

Gonzagues and Peyrolles had now reached the end of the walk.

A lady in a court dress, covered with a large black domino, and wearing a mask, came from the other side. She was leaning on the arm of an old gentleman. The lady and gentleman passed the end of the walk.

"Did you recognise her?" asked Gonzagues, who had pushed his factotum, and withdrawn himself into the shade.

"No," answered Peyrolles.

"My dear President," said the lady at this moment, "I beg of you not to accompany me further."

"Shall you again need my services to-night?" asked the old gentleman.

"Would you meet me here in an hour?"

"It is the President Lamoignon," whispered Peyrolles.

Gonzagues said:

"The lady looks as if she had not yet found what she seeks; let us not lose sight of her."

The masked lady, who was no other than the Princess Gonzagues, hid her face in the hood of her domino, and took her way towards the fountain of the Mississippi.

The crowd was again in a fever of excitement. The arrival of the Regent and of good Mr. Law, the second personage in the kingdom, was announced.

The young King did not count as anyone yet.

" You did not tell me, Prince," said Peyrolles, " whether the Hunchback was to be got rid of to-night."

" What! are you so much afraid of the Hunchback?"

" If you had heard him as I did!"

" What! talk of gaping tombs, and ghosts and Divine vengeance. Oh! I know all that rigmarole. I wish to talk to him. It will not be to-night. To-night we will follow the road he pointed out. Listen to me, and try to comprehend. This night, if he keeps the promise that he made—and he will keep it, I answer for him—we will keep the promise that he made the Regent in my name. A man is coming to the *fête*, the terrible enemy of my whole life. He who makes all tremble like leaves."

" Lagardère!" murmured Peyrolles.

" In the brilliantly-lighted room, amid the excited crowd already expecting some great event, we will snatch off his mask, and proclaim him 'the assassin of Nevers'!"

" Did you see?" asked Navailles.

" By my faith!" answered Gironne; " it must be the Princess herself."

" Alone, without a gentleman or a page," said Choisy.

" She is looking for some one."

" By Jove! what a beautiful creature!" cried Chaverny, awakened out of his melancholy.

" That pink domino! Venus herself!"

" It is Mademoiselle Clermont, who is looking for me," said Nocé.

" The fool!" cried Chaverny; " don't you see it is the lady of General Tessé seeking me while her husband is running after the Czar?"

" Fifty louis it is Mademoiselle Clermont!"

" A hundred it is Madame Tessé!"

" Let us go and ask her if she is Mademoiselle Clermont or Madame Tessé!"

The two giddy-pates were rushing towards her, when they for the first time perceived that the beautiful stranger was followed at a little distance by two fellows with long swords.

" What a bore!" said they both at once; " it is neither Mademoiselle Clermont nor the General's lady; it is an adventure."

They were all assembled round the fountain. A visit to the buffets covered with delicacies and wines had put them again in good-humor.

Oriol, the new esquire, longed to perform some brilliant deed, and gain his spurs.

" Gentlemen," he cried, " don't you think it is more likely Mademoiselle Nivelle?"

They played him the trick of never answering when he spoke of the actress with whom he was in love.

The beautiful unknown looked very much out of place in the midst of this assembly. Her mask even could not hide her embarrassment.

The two attendants walked side by side ten or twelve paces behind her.

" Let us do our duty, brother Passepoil."

" Cocardasse, my noble friend, let us do our duty."

It was no time for joking; the Hunchback had threatened them in Lagardère's name; they believed that the severe eye of a vigilant master was upon them. They were as grave and stiff as soldiers on duty. To be able to enter the ball, they had been back to the street *Du Chanvre*, changed their clothes, and taken the opportunity of releasing Françoise and Berichon.

Poor Blanche lost in the crowd, had for more than an hour been seeking Lagardère. She passed the Princess Gonzagues, and was on the point of speaking to her, for the looks of those silly young fellows frightened her. But what could she say to obtain the protection of one of those noble ladies, who were at home in this brilliant scene? She had not courage. Besides, she was in haste to reach the statue of Diana, which was the place of meeting.

" Gentlemen," said Chaverny, " it is neither Mademoiselle Clermont, nor the General's lady, nor Nivelle, nor any one that we know. She is a young beauty, quite fresh. A tradesman's daughter would not have that queenly presence; a mere country girl could never attain that enchanting grace; a court lady could never affect that charming embarrassment. I have a proposition to make."

The circle of young scapergaces crowded round Chaverny.

" She is seeking some one," he continued; " is she not?"

" That is evident," said Nocé.

" Well, gentlemen, that somebody is a happy fellow."

" Granted; but that is no proposition."

" It is not right," went on the little Marquis, " that such a treasure should be monopolised by a fellow who does not belong to our worthy brotherhood; therefore

I propose that the dear creature should not find the person she seeks."

"Bravo!" was echoed from all. "Chaverny is himself again."

"Secondly, that instead of that person, she should find one of us."

"But which of us?" cried Navailles.

"Me—me!" cried everyone at once.

Even Oriol forgot his duty to Mademoiselle Nivelle.

Chaverny by a gesture besought silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, "these debates are premature; when we have taken the lovely girl out of the charge of her grim guardians, we will play honorably at thimble-rig, at faro, or at straws, for the honor of being her attendant."

Such a wise proposal was secure of general approbation.

"To the assault, then!" cried Navailles.

"One moment, gentlemen!" said the little Marquis; "I claim the honor of directing the expedition."

"Granted—granted I to the assault!"

Chaverny looked around him.

"The question," he said, "is, not to make a noise. The garden is full of soldiers, and it would not be pleasant to get ourselves expelled before supper. We must use strategem. Can those among you who have good eyes see anywhere a pink domino?"

"Mademoiselle Nivelle has one," slipped out Oriol.

"Oh! here are two—three—four."

"I mean a pink domino of our acquaintance."

"There's Mademoiselle Debois!" cried Navailles.

"There's Cidalise!" cried Tiranne.

"We only want one. I choose Cidalise, because she is about the height and figure of our beauty. Bring Cidalise to me."

Cidalise was brought.

"My dear," said the little Marquis, "Oriol, who is an esquire now, will give you a hundred crowns if you will serve us adroitly. We want to put those two dogs yonder off their scent, and you must do it for us."

"And will it be a good joke?" asked Cidalise.

"Oh, famous!" answered Chaverny.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

Oriol did not object to the promise of a hundred crowns, because he had been called an esquire. Cidalise was willing, if, as she said, there was a good joke in it. Her instructions were quickly given: she had only to glide from group to group, until, unperceived, she could take her place between Blanche and her two followers. In the meantime, a detachment sent off by General Chaverny skirmished against Cocardasse and Passepoil, whilst a second detachment manœuvred to cut off Blanche. Cocardasse first was elbowed; he swore a terrible Gascon oath, and put his hand to his sword. Passepoil whispered: "Our duty—let us behave ourselves." Passepoil then received a good cuff, which made him stumble. Cocardasse saw his eye glisten, and murmured: "Let us behave ourselves." A heavy heel came upon the Gascon's instep, whilst the Norman stumbled a second time, for somebody's scabbard had got between his legs. "Let us behave ourselves." Taranne gave Passepoil a violent push, and called him a coward; Gironne jostled Cocardasse, and called him a scoundrel. "Let us behave ourselves!" the poor fellows cried; but their ears burned.

"My friend," murmured Cocardasse, at the fourth offence, and looking piteously at Passepoil, "I am afraid I am getting angry."

Passepoil puffed like a whale, but did not answer. When Taranne returned to the charge, he received a violent box on the ear. Cocardasse drew breath, as if greatly relieved that he had not been the first. With one blow of his fist, he sent Gironne and the innocent Oriol rolling in the dust.

They were off their guard. It was only for a moment, yet another party, led by Chaverny in person, had time to surround Blanche and turn her in another direction. Cocardasse and Passepoil, having got rid of their tormentors, looked straight before them. They saw the pink domino still in advance: it was Cidalise, who was earning her hundred crowns. Cocardasse and Passepoil, happy in having revenged themselves with impunity, renewed their guard over Cidalise, repeating triumphantly: "Let us behave ourselves!"

In the meanwhile, Blanche having lost her way, and no longer seeing her two protectors behind her, was forced to follow the

movements of those around her. These made believe to give way to the crowd, and gradually approached the clump of trees between the sheet of water and the statue of Diana. In the middle of this shrubbery was the lodge of Le Bréant. The narrow paths through it were serpentine, after the English fashion, now just introduced. The crowd followed the great avenues, and left these paths almost deserted. Close to the lodge, especially, there was a hidden and isolated bower. Thither poor Blanche was drawn. Chaverry put his hand up to her mask; she screamed aloud, for she recognised the young gentleman she had seen at Madrid.

At her cry, the door of the lodge opened and a tall man, masked, and entirely covered with a large black domino, appeared on the threshold. He had a naked sword in his hand.

"Don't be frightened, charming creature!" said the little Marquis. "These gentlemen and myself are your devoted admirers."

Saying this, he tried to pass his arm round Blanche's waist, who screamed for help. Albert slid behind her, and slipped a silk handkerchief over her mouth. The black domino seized Chaverry by the nape of the neck, and threw him ten feet off; Albert had the same fate. Several swords were drawn. The black domino disarmed Gironne and Noce; seeing which, and forgetting his wished-for spurs, Oriol took to flight crying out, "Help! help!" Montaubert and Choisy charged; the first fell from a violent blow on the ear, the latter had a cut across the face. The guard came up at the clashing of swords; our adventurers dispersed like a flock of starlings. The soldiers found no one in the bower; for the black domino and the young girl had also disappeared. They only heard the door of the lodge shut, and only saw a pink domino disappearing with the speed of fear in another direction. The sharpest eyed guardsmen might perhaps have also seen a face reminding one of honest Master Peyrolles spying from behind a statue after the female fugitive.

"By Jove!" said Chaverry, meeting Navailles in the crowd, "what a push! I must find that fellow out, if only to compliment him on his fist."

Gironne and Noce arrived crestfallen; Choisy was in a corner, holding a handkerchief to a bleeding cheek; Montaubert did his best to hide his wounded ear;

Oriol alone was unhurt—the brave little Oriol! They all looked ashamed—the jest had failed; and each one among them wondered who their rough swordsman could be. They knew by heart everyone at the fencing-school at Paris. These places did not flourish now as they had done formerly; people had not leisure. No one among the present virtuosi of the sword could rout seven or eight swordsmen so easily. The black domino had not even got entangled in his long drapery. He had only dealt three or four good thrusts, but they were dealt with a master hand, and were effectual. It must be a stranger in the fencing-school; no one—not even the teachers themselves—had such marvelous skill.

Just now the Duke of Nevers, killed in the flower of his youth, had been spoken of. His memory still lived in all fencing-schools—his sword flashed like lightning, his foot was as firm as iron, his eye as quick as that of a lynx. But he was dead, and certainly all here could testify that the black domino was no ghost. There had been a man in Never's time, equal, if not superior, to Never himself, whose name was Henri Lagardère. But what mattered the name of that terrible swordsman? One thing was certain—our rakes were not in luck to-night. The Hunchback had beaten them with his tongue, the black domino with the sword. On both they had to take their revenge.

"The ballet! the ballet!" "His Royal Highness the Regent! the Princesses!" "Mr. Law, this way, with Lord Stair, the English Ambassador from the Court of Queen Anne." "Don't push so—there is room for everyone!" "Awkward! insolent! ruffian!" And all the other delights of a crowd—ribs squeezed, feet trampled on, women smothered. From the midst of the crowd, piercing cries were heard. Little women have a passion for drowning themselves in a crowd. They see nothing—they suffer martyrdom; still, they cannot resist the attraction.

Mr. Law—see! he is ascending the steps before the palace. That domino of light grey is Madame Parabère. That lady in a puce domino is the Duchess of Phalaris. How red Mr. Law looks! he must have dined well. How pale the Regent is! he must have received bad news from Spain. Hush, hush!—the ballet!

The orchestra placed round the basin gave forth its first notes. The platform

for the audience was on the side towards the palace. It was a slope of dazzling splendor and beauty. Opposite, the curtain rose slowly by invisible mechanism, and discovered a well-represented view in Louisiana, where the gigantic trees of the virgin forest nearly touched the clouds, and vast prairies lost themselves in the distance, through which passed the great Father of Waters—the magnificent golden river, Mississippi. On the banks were smiling views, and everywhere that bright green so dear to the painters of that age. Mossy caves, picturesque grottoes, and delicious arbors, were scattered about. Young Indian girls wandered amid all this loveliness; young mothers hung their babies' cradles on the graceful boughs of the sassafras; warriors amused themselves with shooting and throwing the hatchet, whilst old men smoked around the fire of council. At the moment the curtain drew up, several pieces of scenery rose round the basin, so that the statue of Mississippi placed in its centre appeared framed in a lovely landscape. From the platform, and from one end of the garden to the other, there was one universal burst of applause.

Oriol was beside himself, when Nivelle, who played the principal character in the ballet—that of the daughter of the Mississippi—came forward.

"Well," he cried, nudging his two neighbors, who happened to be the two Barons, Brabanchois and La Hunaudaye, "is not that good?"

The two Barons looked down on him disdainfully.

"How light! how graceful! how brilliant!" cried the fat little stock broker, unabashed. "The skirt alone cost me a hundred and fifty, the wings eighty pounds more, the girdle sixty, and the diadems a whole share in the stocks. Bravo, adorable creature!—bravo!"

The Barons looked at each other significantly over his head.

"Such a splendid creature!" said Brabanchois.

"To get her toilet from such a fellow!" added his friend. "What are we coming to, Baron—what are we coming to?"

A thunder of applause followed. Oriol's Nivelle was charming, and her dance on the borders of the river, among the brilliant foliage, was thought delicious. All honor to Mr. Law, who had devised such a delightful treat. Everyone smiled on him, and the ladies fell in love with him. Still,

there were two men who could not partake of the general joy.

Cocardasse and Passepoil had for ten minutes most attentively followed Cidalise in her pink domino, when suddenly she disappeared, as if swallowed up by an earthquake. This was behind the fountain at the entrance of a tent of palm-leaves. When Cocardasse and Passepoil wished to follow her, two sentinels barred their passage. The tent belonged to the ladies of the ballet.

"By Jove, comrades!" cried Cocardasse. "Be off!" cried the sentinels.

"My brave friends—" began Passepoil.

"Be off!" was his only answer.

They looked at each other pitifully; they had suffered the bird confined to their care to escape—all was lost!

"Well, we have done all we could," said Cocardasse, with a deep sigh.

"But luck was against us," added Passepoil, weeping. "I will only entreat him to despatch me with a thrust in the heart; it won't make much difference to him."

"What should you do that for?" asked the Gascon.

Passepoil's eyes, red and full of tears, did not embellish him; and his friend owned he had seldom seen so ugly a physiognomy.

"I wish, my noble friend, that my face should not be disfigured. I who have all my life been used to please the fair sex, should grieve to think that I might displease any after my death."

"The devil!" muttered Cocardasse, but he could not laugh.

The ballet, entitled the "Daughter of the Mississippi," was strikingly original. The maiden of the great river, in the pretty person of Nivelle, after having fluttered among the flowers and foliage to general satisfaction, gracefully called her companions, who came forward, garlands in hand, and executed a dance, which was greeted with much applause.

The maiden's companions, of course, consisted of Cidalise, Dubois, La Feun, and other dancing celebrities of the time. All at once, a band of Indian savages, whose only dress consisted of a crown of feathers, rushed from the woods, and with horrid grimaces and gestures approached the young girls, and struck at them with their hatchets, evidently with the intention of making a feast of them. Then murderers and victims danced a minuet, which was encored. Then, at the moment when the

maidens were about to be devoured, a flourish of trumpets was heard at a distance, and a troop of French sailors jumped on shore, vigorously dancing a hornpipe. The savages, still dancing, shook their fists at them, while the maidens held out their arms imploring their help. A battle-dance ensued, during which the French captain and Indian chief executed a famous *pas de deux*. The victory of the French was declared by a general twirl, the defeat of the savages by a flying leap. Then followed the garland dance, representing the dawn of civilization in those barbarous lands. But the prettiest of all was the last scene, which proved its author incontestably a man of genius. The river maiden, dancing with unabated agility, threw away her garland and took up a golden cup. With graceful twirls and piroquettes, she ascended the steep path which led up to the statue of the river-god. There, balancing herself admirably on one toe, she filled her cup from the fountain of the Mississippi, and in a crowning piroquette abundantly sprinkled the Frenchmen still dancing below her. But, wonder upon wonders! it was not water that fell from that golden cup, but a real shower of gold. How stupid must those be who could not understand so delicate and well-imagined a conceit!

The success was immense. When the dancers disappeared behind the shrubs, three or four thousand voices cried out: "Long live Mr. Law!" But it was not yet finished: there was to be a song, and who was to sing? Verily, and in truth, the statue of the river-god. Signor Angelini, first tenor at the opera, took the part of the statue. The song, which was, if possible, more ingenious than the ballet, consisted of several verses; one in honor of the young King, another of the Regent, a third immortalizing Mr. Law as Caledonia's glorious son, sent by the gods to the Gallic shores, bringing peace and riches in his hand. In fact, everyone must be gratified. When the god had finished his song, he was taken off his pedestal, and the ball went on.

The Prince Gonzagues had been obliged to fill his place on the platform during the performance. His conscience made him dread some change in the Regent's manner towards himself, but his reception had been as favorable as ever. Before taking his place, he had set Peyrolles to watch the Princess, and to let him know if any stran-

ger accosted her. He had received no message. Everything progressed satisfactorily. After the performance, Gonzagues joined his factotum under the Indian tent, near the statue of Diana.

The Princess Gonzagues was alone in one of the side halls, evidently expecting someone. Just as Gonzagues was about to retire, not to risk frightening the game that he wished to snare, our troops of silly young rakes rushed into the tent, laughing with all their might. They had already forgot their mishaps, and were making all sorts of fun of the ballet and the song. Chaverny imitated the growling of the savages; Nocé was singing with fearful shakes the verse about Caledonia's glorious son.

"Was not she splendid?" cried Oriol. "What bursts of applause! The dress has something to do with it."

"And you, too?" cried all his companions. "A crown for Oriol! Let us do homage to Oriol, the glorious prince of the stock exchange!"

The sight of Gonzagues hushed all this clamor; and each one, except Chaverny, resumed his demeanor as courtier, and paid his respects.

"At last we find you, cousin," said Navailles. "We were uneasy."

"There is no *fête* without this dear Prince," cried Oriol.

"Ah, cousin!" said Chaverny, seriously; "do you know what has happened?"

"Many things happen," replied Gonzagues.

"But," asked Chaverny, "did you hear what happened here a little while since?"

"I told his Highness," interrupted Peyrolles.

"What! did he tell you of the man with the cutlass?" asked Nocé.

"We can laugh afterwards," said Chaverny. "The Regent's favor is my last patrimony, and I only have it secondhand. I have need that my illustrious cousin should remain well at court. If he could assist the Regent in his researches."

"We are all at the Princess' orders," said the rakes.

"Besides," continued Chaverny, "this affair of Nevers, which is brought forward again after so many years, interests me, like all touching romances. Come, cousin, have you any suspicion?"

"No," answered Gonzagues; "nothing that might give you a clue. Yes," interrupted the Prince, as if an idea suddenly struck him; "there is one man."

"What man?"

"You are too young; you could not know him. That man," continued Gonzagues, as if thinking aloud, "could tell what hand struck my poor Philip of Nevers."

"His name?" cried several voices.

"Henri de Lagardère."

"He is here!" cried Chaverry, heedlessly; "then he must be our black domino."

"What! asked Gonzagues, anxiously: "yon have seen him?"

"A stupid affair; we do not know Lagardère from Adam, cousin. But if he happened to be at the ball——"

"If he were at the ball," interrupted the Prince Gonzagues, "I would undertake to show his Royal Highness the assassin of Nevers."

"I am here!" pronounced firmly a man's voice behind him.

This voice made Gonzagues start so violently, that Nocé caught hold of him.

At the sound of this voice, the Princess Gonzagues rose from her seat, greatly agitated.

It was the voice which had prompted her from behind the picture of her husband at the family tribunal.

The tall black domino who had so powerfully broken up the young blades' sport, entered the Indian tent,

At the same moment, from nearly opposite, the Regent, with his suite, came in. His entrance made Gonzagues remove his hand from off his sword-belt, which he had put there on seeing the black domino appear.

The Regent slightly started.

"Lagardère," muttered he.

The man in black advanced.

"Henn, Chevalier de Lagardère, as ever at your Highness's service," said he, removing his hat and revealing the face of Blanche's protector.

His face was never more handsome, nor his form more graceful than in the rich but severe court-dress he wore. A shade of uncertainty was, however, on his face.

"My lord! your Highness!" cried Gonzagues, who thought it became him to take the first step, "however unfeigned the place, I proclaim that man an assassin!"

A number of the guests came crowding round the openings in the Indian tent.

"I Philip, Prince Gonzagues," went on the Duke, "proclaim Henri de Lagardère the murderer of Philip de Nevers!"

"Nevers!" repeated the old Baron as if they had expected the denunciation.

Without orders, a lieutenant in the royal guard stretched out his hand to seize Lagardère.

The latter waved him back.

"Your Highness, listen——"

"Arrest that man!" exclaimed Gonzagues imprudently.

The young lieutenant laid his hand on the ruffled sleeve of the chevalier's coat.

Lagardère quickly unclasped his sword-belt and gave blade and appurtenance to the guardsmen.

"I cannot escape now," said he simply. Then, in a lofty tone, he added to the Regent: "I have your safe-conduct. I do not ask for passage, therefore, but for a hearing. I promised your highness not only that I would reveal to you the true murderer of the Duke of Nevers, but also would restore to this lady (and he turned to the Princess Gonzagues) the lawful heiress of Duke Philip."

Lady Gonzagues clasped her hands in joy, and looked around.

A slight scuffle began at the left hand doorway of the tent, as if some one was forcing away. It was Passepoil.

Lagardère moved over to him, with a gaze of intense expectation.

"Couldn't see her," whispered Passepoil as quickly as his pale, trembling lips would allow. He did not dare look at Lagardère.

"One of my knaves speak to Lagardère," muttered Gonzagues, recognizing Passepoil. At the same moment somebody plucked at his sleeve. It was Peyrolles who strove to hide himself from Lagardère.

"Lagardère's lady is caught—I sent her to our house in the street St. Magloire!" whispered he.

"Good, good!" said Gonzagues as his heart warmed again. "Hark ye, Peyrolles, get half a dozen men together and watch. Lagardère must not leave the palace with an unpierced doublet——"

Peyrolles was already sneaking from the room, for Lagardère had turned that way. He had understood his master's orders.

The chevalier had not seen him, but had caught sight of a man behind the now great throng, through which he could not make his way.

This man stuffed something in his glove, which he dexterously tossed into the centre of the crowd.

Passepoil picked it up, winked at the man as his lips formed the words, "All

right, Cocardasse'" and gave it to Lagardère. The contents was a line hurriedly and wretchedly scrawled.

"Off—in a coach—Gonzagues' livery, I think.—Coc."

Lagardère paled as if he had received a mortal wound.

"My daughter?" said the Princess, appealingly, while a sudden dread chilled her blood.

"Madame, she is in the utmost danger, if not dead. Pray for her, and for me, for I will save her, if Heaven wills! Your Highness's safe-conduct is not expired," continued he; "short are the hours I have yet, but, by the help of the just Heaven he has offended, I will within them unmask the murderer! Have I permission to depart?" concluded he, as he turned his eyes from Gonzagues, at whom he had buried his last words, upon the Regent.

The Duke of Orleans bowed, and said to the guard behind him: "Go to the palace gate with the gentleman, and see no one—no one binders him." And as the chevalier passed him to go out by the door, after having tried to give hope to the Princess Gonzagues in a look, the Regent whispered inquiringly: "Lagardère?—"

"I will!" said Lagardère, as he left the tent.

Passepoil and Cocardasse had disappeared.

The Regent glanced at the Princess Gonzagues, who was nearly swooning, and then at Gonzagues, who was surrounded by his worshippers. If he had intended to speak to them, he altered his mind, for, on hearing de Sauvron, his master-of-hounds, whisper to a page that Madame de Parabère was asking for Orleans, he went out to meet her.

The courtiers followed his example, and scattered over the grounds to give more or less accurate accounts of the little they had seen of the incidents.

Gonzagues replied to those friends who expressed their wonder that the Regent should have given the assassin of Nevers a safe-conduct, and let him escape when he was in the lion's den, that the Duke of Orleans no doubt had his reasons. And then he quite forgot his usual demeanor, entered into the sports he had formerly scorned, and, half an hour later, might have been seen playing at straws with Navailles with more light-heartedness apparently than his antagonist displayed.

His wife had gone sadly home in her chair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PEYROLLES DIGS A PIT FOR ANOTHER, AND FALLS INTO IT HIMSELF.

We have said a sharper-eyed guardsman than the others, when they came running to the lodge at the sound of sword-play, might have seen Master Peyrolles near that spot.

Blanche had divined that her deliverer in black was her lover and adopted father. He had made a hasty sign to her, and she thought he meant for her to take refuge in an alley behind the lodge, and she ran up it.

Lagardère scattered the young court butterflies, as we have seen, and, believing Blanche in the lodge, rushed into it at the guards' approach. No one was there. He rushed out, sought right and left, and found, not her he sought, but Passepoil and Cocardasse, who confessed their fault, begging him to rid them of the life which would be painful to them if they dwelt under his displeasure. He instantly set them on the search, and went himself to confront Nevers' widow and Nevers' murderer.

Passepoil scoured the gardens, but found nobody.

Cocardasse came nearer. He reached the gates, and learned from its keeper that a coach, in which was a pink domino, had left the palace. The half-livery of its attendants was like Gonzagues'.

The truth was, Blanche had run several yards along the winding path. She stopped. There was no footsteps behind her, but a man was walking quickly in a parallel path which joined that she was in some few steps beyond. She hastened there, and fell into the arms of—Peyrolles. He gagged her scientifically, and carried her a little way, for she had fainted, till he got together some of his master's people, and pushed her into a coach. Then he returned with the welcome report.

Peyrolles came down the marble steps, after receiving his master's commands respecting Lagardère, should the latter escape, and fell into talk with the second keeper-of-the-royal-boar-hounds, who happened to be a bravo Peyrolles had had dealings with, and who indeed had obtained his place to keep him out of the way until a little affair in the street St. Jacques du Haut Pas (in which a grocer's daughter had been strangled by a scarf the said bravo had held, and

which had most unaccountably drawn tight around her neck) was blown over.

Peyrolles was partly relieved of his quandary. He had sent most of his men off with the coach, and was glad to secure this fellow's sword and arm.

The new recruit was following Peyrolles, when the latter started, as greatly as if the Czar Peter had appeared before him to conclude the ear-cropping performance of his. A man was crossing the courtyard near them.

"Ha! Cocardasse!" cried Peyrolles.

Cocardasse turned.

"Master Peyrolles!" said he, assuming a smile his friend Passepoil would have envied.

Whereupon, Peyrolles acquainted him with the fact that his (Cocardasse's) purse would be well lined if he would again engage his famous blade in the service of the renowned Prince Gonzagues. The Gascon very eagerly consented when he learnt that the would-be victim was the black domino.

Peyrolles posted the two bullies at the palace gates, while he ran to the wine-shop at the end of the Passerelle du Palais (Palace Lane), where were always to be found disbanded soldiers, etc., and where the palace guards off duty came to drink. Here he speedily hired half a dozen men of the sword, sealed the bargain with a cup of the best wine, and strode back to the palace with his six hang-dog rascals at his heels.

They had scarcely been waiting ten minutes, before the side-gate in the large ones opened to let out two men. The first was their prey.

Peyrolles, feeling himself well supported, sprang from the shadow where they were all lurking, and ran his sword in Lagardère's sword arm.

At the same time, two of the ex-soldiers thrust at his back.

Lagardère, luckily, had turned at the stroke, and Peyrolles' weapon being entangled in his sleeve, the blade snapped about six inches from the point at the wheel he made. To wrench the sword from the other's grasp was easy enough for him, and he faced the bravoes with the fragment. One of them he cut severely in the hip, but another, taking advantage of the shortness of the weapon bringing him within reach, gave such a downward sweep of his heavy sword that Lagardère's weapon bent and flew down to

the ground, while his arm was bandaged up to the shoulder.

Meanwhile, Cocardasse had sprung at the man who had come out with Lagardère and seizing him, whispered: "Drop, Passepoil—and then follow!"

Passepoil gave a groan and laid himself down as gracefully as a supposed dying man could be expected to do.

Lagardère saw him fall and, believing his obligations to his comrade fulfilled and seeing no hope but in flight, he ran swiftly down the street, making his way at random.

He had been so long out of the city that he did not know it well, and his only idea was to outrun his pursuers. His position was such that he could not ask help from the archers of the watch when he heard them going their rounds in the streets only lighted by a few lamps, placed before doors or in niches of saints.

The numb sensation in his arm had given way, and the damp clammy stream on it told him that his blood was oozing out. He ripped open the sleeve, found the cut to be only a skin wound thanks to the ample sleeve, and bound it up with his neck-cloth.

He had reached the quay at the beginning of the street du Bac, on the river. He felt that such a chase would not be longer sustained and determined to end it. He ran a few steps farther and reached the Pont Royal. A heap of large stones were at its end, left there to mend a gap. He crouched down behind them, taking up one small stone as his only weapon. His sword he had left in the Palais Royal, and the one he had snatched from Peyrolles had been rendered useless as we have seen.

For a moment all was still. Then a series of shouts arose and a long line of links flaming and smoking streamed along the street parallel to the Seme. One man, however, from among these pursuers, came down the street of the Ferry, sword in hand.

"I'll have that weapon," muttered Lagardère as he saw the blade glint in the moonlight, "or die for it."

And he grasped the stone tightly.

The man approached, and the chevalier sprang out on him.

"Cocar—"

"Hush!" whispered the Gascon. "I put Peyrolles off the scent, but they may return."

"Blanche?"

"The girl? yes? The Duke has got her—Peyrolles told me as much."

A second man came down along the wharves, preceding the torch-bearers.

"Passepoil!" said Lagardère.

"Right as ever!" said the Norman; "but Peyrolles' fellows come."

Lagardère tried to take Cocardasse's sword.

"No," said he, "you are as pale as death. You can easily pretend death. Do so."

"An idea!" said Passepoil.

Cocardasse pushed his friend.

"Get behind those stones," ordered he, and Passepoil eclipsed himself.

Lagardère had lain down on the bridge, and the moon shone on his bloodless face and stained clothes.

Cocardasse affected to give him a finishing stroke and was wiping his sword ostentatiously as Peyrolles, preceded by several of his bullies, came up.

"Lagardère?" said Peyrolles.

Cocardasse pointed to the prostrate form with his naked sword.

"Dead as mutton. He could not get over your wound," said he.

Peyrolles drew a long breath.

"The Prince will like that," muttered he. "Ha, knaves, hunt up two sedan chairs. Be quick!"

The bearers of lanterns and torches set off, leaving Peyrolles and the Gascon alone together.

"Art sure he is dead?" queried Peyrolles. "Quite, eh? I wish the troublesome fellow were ten feet under ground," added he, looking around. "But," said he, as with back on Lagardère he glanced at the river, "ten feet under water will do as well. Cocardasse, gag and bind him, and tie a stone about his neck and heave him over!"

And he turned to see his order carried out. Meanwhile, Lagardère had risen. Peyrolles gave a jump back, when he struck against another man. He gave a second groan; it was Passepoil cutting off his retreat.

"Peyrolles, the last but one," said Lagardère. "Cocardasse, gag and bind him, and tie a stone about his neck and heave him over!"

Passepoil and his comrade set about the work as though it was a labor of love. In a minute, poor Peyrolles was trussed like a pullet.

"Do unto others as others do unto you," muttered Cocardasse, as he lifted the pinioned body by the shoulders.

Passepoil took the leeks.

"Once, twice, thrice! So passes the justice of Lagardère!" said they, as they swung Peyrolles over the railing into the Seine.

Passepoil, during the binding, had found a key in the pocket of the Prince's factotum, which Lagardère pocketted.

The two sedan-chairs came up to find the spot deserted.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HUNCHBACK'S WEDDING.

THE morning after the events related in the previous chapter, Prince Gonzagues was seated in an elegant little room in his private house in the street St. Magloire, in which was encaged Blanche. He was waiting the coming upstairs of two persons whom the servant had just announced.

Cocardasse and the Little Hunchback entered the room. The latter was as brisk and smiling as ever.

"The news?" said the Prince, rising.

"Lagardère is dead," returned Cocardasse.

"So my men told me," went on the Prince. "But tell me how."

Cocardasse told the story truthfully enough up to the end.

"We lost track of him," concluded he, "and he would have escaped if this gentleman (and he bowed to the Hunchback) had not shouted to me and put me right. Even then the chevalier might have got clear, for though surrounded he wrestled violently with me, but this gentleman (and he bowed still lower to Aesop) passed his sword right neatly through his breast."

The Prince thanked the Hunchback with a look, in which surprise was not wanting.

"But Peyrolles?" inquired he.

"Gone on a journey, I think he said," replied Cocardasse.

"Strange," muttered Gonzagues, "he never told me."

"He went, probably, unexpectedly and against his will," broke in, or rather cut in the sharp voice of Aesop.

Gonzagues started involuntarily.

"Go to my steward," said he to Cocar-

dasse, "and receive fifty crowns. And you, my friend," he went on to Master Aesop, "go also—"

The Hunchback smiled.

"No money for me" said he. "A few words with your Highness will repay me far better."

"I can give you half an hour," said Gonzagues astonished, and yet blaming himself that he should be astonished at anything the wonderful little Hunchback did or said.

As Cocardasse bowed slowly and low to the Prince, this brought his ear level with the mouth of the Hunchback, who whispered quickly:

"To where you know—at once!"

The Gascon left the room to touch his fifty crowns.

The Hunchback took a seat.

"Is my lord listening?" said he. "Please, no interruptions. About twenty years ago, a young and pretty girl sold flowers at the market on the Quai de la Megisserie. One day, a courtier, by some chance, beheld her, and soon her name, Honorine, was in the mouths of many of the palace butterflies. They even came to laying wagers as to which should win her. None could, for her name seemed to have been given her in prophecy, for she was all honor. At last, one of the young gallants grew angry that he should be foiled in love affairs, and he came, with half a dozen others to abduct her from her father's house. The lover—no, no, the abductor, I mean—seized her and was lifting her out of the window to the lamp-lighter's ladder which for a crown or two had been lent them, when her lover—a youth who lived near by, and who fancied, still fancies, her to be all goodness and loveliness—reached the spot. He snatched a sword from one of the half dozen who were laughing at the good, rare jest, and spoilt the silks and satins over the heart of several of them.

"The girl had fainted. The man on the ladder, holding her, drew his sword, as the youth who had dispersed his friends sprang up the rounds. The former was the second, if not the first swordsman in France, and he disarmed his antagonist at the third pass. The two grappled there on the ladder, but the gallant was the stronger, and he flung me to the ground, from which I rose—what I am!"

The Prince shuddered.

"The courtier was—"

"Lagardère, cornet in the King's Lifeguards," returned the Hunchback, "as I

was the lover of Honorine. Do you understand now why I hated Lagardère?"

"You are revenged, you have killed him," said Prince Gonzagues.

"Not wholly. You can aid me to complete my payment."

"Your services to me make me interested in you. My influence at court is yours—"

"No, no. In a word, your Highness has Blanche de Nevers here, in this house—don't interrupt—and is puzzled how to get rid of her. Marry her to me!"

The Prince opened his eyes in amazement.

"Marry—to you?"

"Yes; I will take her to Spain, Italy, to Law's Mississippi, anywhere. Believe, she will not return after union with a hunchback."

"There's something in this," thought the Prince. "You may be a friend of the family—"

"Would the proud Blanch de Caylus receive Aesop the Second as her son-in-law?" returned the queer little fellow, as he smiled.

"But the lady will never consent—"

"He, he! won't she though! I am an enchanter, when I like to be! She will jump at the match, he, he!"

"I have invited my friends here to-day for a petit souper, with a trifling addition. Your wedding shall be a further treat."

On the instant, the speaker rang the bell, and despatched a servant for a notary. Before the messenger returned, the invited guest were all in the Prince's room. Many and loud were the bursts of laughter when Navailles, Oriol and all heard of the Hunchback's espousal to a young and lovely lady. Amidst the hilarity Chaverry entered. He was less frivolous than usual.

The Prince frowned.

"I did not invite him," he muttered. Chaverry bowed, as he said: "But pardon, Prince, but I think you forgot to invite me."

The Little Hunchback smiled to himself: "He received my note. I am glad he is come, Prince," he continued to Gonzagues, "if you will let me have a three minutes' tête à tête with the lady, I will obtain her consent."

Gonzagues' presence alone restrained the indignation which would have burst forth.

"You can step into that corridor," the Little Hunchback said, "and look on all the while."

At a sign from Gonzagues, Blanche was brought in. Clearly she had so deeply grieved during the night, that she was now a spiritless body, worn out, exhausted. But when the Prince sought to take her hand, she dropped hers.

"No," said she, "I know you now. You are he who has—heaven knows why—persecuted me so long."

Chaverry stepped forward and leading Blanche to a chair, said:

"Lady, if you mean that you need a protector, I will be it to you!"

The little Hunchback smiled to himself, and rubbed his hands.

"I had a protector," returned Blanche not recognising the young noble, who had recognized her, nevertheless, as the pink domino, "I had a protector once, but they have killed him, as they may kill me. Oh, sirs, sirs!" cried she to all, "kill me, that I may join him."

But Gonzagues had already induced many of the guests to leave the room, and was arguing with Chaverry.

"You can see all, my young friend," said the Little Hunchback, "and can use your sword soon enough when it is needed!"

Chaverry, at last, after a look at Blanche who sat drooping in the high-backed chair, joined the other. The Hunchback was alone with the young girl; though so many eyes were upon them.

"Blanche! Blanche! it is I!" said he in a tone unlike his cracked everyday one. "Ienri!" exclaimed she starting, with a flush on her cheeks.

"Hush! I am in disguise here. Don't try to look. Do as I bid you. They want to marry us—"

"To marry us?"

"Thinking me a deformed, misshapen wretch. To save ourselves, you must appear to consent."

He made some passes after the magnetic fashion over her head.

"See, Navailles!" said Oriol.

"St!"

"Let your hand drop in mine, dear love!" said the Hunchback. "Rise slowly. Rest your head on the breast which is your shield. Now, he, he!" chuckled he alone, "come, sirs, to the wedding!"

All entered, crying: "Witchcraft!" "Is

he the devil?" "A sin, isn't it?" "Ought to be burnt!" and so on.

The notary spread the marriage contract on the table. The Hunchback motioned Gonzagues and the others to sign, as witnesses, first. All did so.

"Sign Blanche de Nevers," said the Little Hunchback to the girl.

"Now yours!" cried all

"Lucifer's, I'll warrant!" cried Navailles and Albert together.

The Hunchback dashed off a name, and then drew Blanche back a step, standing before her. To right and left he flung his wig and his coat, and stood, with unsheathed blade, an upright, handsome man.

"The black domino!" cried Montaubers instinctively feeling of his ear.

"Henri de Lagardère!" read Prince Gonzagues. He drew his sword. "Gentlemen, down with him!"

"All on one!" cried Chaverry, placing himself beside Lagardère.

"Down with them! Kill, kill!"

The courtiers made a rush, and, such was their number, that they drove the two back to the wall.

At that moment, when his enemy's life seemed to be the Prince's, a door opened, and soldiers poured in led by Cocard-a-se. By the same door entered numerous people.

"The Regent!" muttered Navailles and his friends as they sheathed their weapons.

"My wife!" said Gonzagues as a female in black entered, to whom Lagardère gave Blanche whereupon the two women fell upon one another's neck.

The chord that had been silent when Pepita was introduced to Blanche de Caylus, sounded now that the real daughter was in her arms.

Duke Philip took a seat and laid his sword upon a table.

"I constitute this a lawful court to open justice. Henri de Lagardère speak!"

"Your Highness," said he who was the Hunchback no longer, "I have fulfilled half my promise. There is the Duke de Nevers' daughter in her mother's arms. The proofs shall be forthcoming. I promised, too, to reveal the Duke's assassin," continued he, walking over to Gonzagues and seizing his shrinking hand, "here is the murderer of Philip of Lorraine, Duke of Nevers! I cut this mark here on the eventful night."

"You did," responded the Prince with

an effort, "but you were the murderer, and I tried to punish you. I say, your Highness, that the lady I brought was the true heiress. Here," and he drew a packet from his bosom, "are the leaf of the register and the other proofs I did not have the other day."

He tore the packet open and flung the contents on the table.

"See how the evil confound themselves," said Lagardère, as he smiled again after biting his lip; "that very wrapper that the Prince holds in his hand denounces the wrong-doer. Before the Duke was murdered, I saw him. The assassins' weapons shone in the moonbeams. Nevers wrote on the packet's cover the name of his butcher and the crime—See, see!"

Gonzagues, with gastly face and trembling fingers, had ignited the denunciatory envelope at a guardsman's torch, and it fell to the floor in sparkling ashes.

"The dead has spoken!" rang from Lagardère's lips. "There was—no—name—on the envelope, but he has written his in characters of fire!"

All drew their suspended breath. There was silence, broken by a dreadful roar from the villain baffled at all points. He whipped his sword out like lightning and rushed at the chevalier, sending Chaverry a dozen feet off.

Lagardère had scarce time to lift his sheathed sword up, and it was bent by the fearful blow. In vain he tugged at the handle, it could not be drawn in time to stop a second cut the madman dealt.

Luckily, Cocardasse stepped up and warded off two straight lunges, which reached Lagardère save by a hand's breadth.

But the chevalier snatched up the Regent's sword and pushed the Gascon aside.

Three prime passes and a direct thrust made Gonzagues break, but he returned more enraged. He made a feint at Lagardère's sword-arm, when the latter beat his

blade aside before he could recover, and full three inches of Lagardère's weapon snapped off in the forehead of the Prince.

He neither groaned nor shrieked, but, even as he fell, struck upward at his victor, but his hand was feeble, and he was dead before he reached the floor.

"The Nevers' thrust," muttered Cocardasse; "by St. Denis, the Little Parisian is the same as of old."

Lagardère looked around.

"Duke Philip of Nevers," said he, "I have kept my vow. Your wife is there, your child in her arms. Your murderer lies there, and I—I am here, dead whilst fulfilling my oath! . . ."

* * * * *

But Lagardère was not dead, although indeed near to it. He had swooned from the conflict of emotions and from the wound he had received from Peyrolles the night before and the Prince's recent one. He returned to life to hear Blanche blushingly tell him her mother had consented gladly to their wedding, not as the Hunchback now, but as the Henri de Lagardère who had been a father to her, and who was now to be the husband.

Perhaps by design of Lagardère, Chaverry was sent to release Pepita from her cage, and that is why, no doubt, she married him some few months afterwards.

Oriol, Navailles, and their fellows, more or less suffered from the Mississippi bubble, their attendance upon ladies of the ballet, and other peccadilloes.

Cocardasse took an appointment in the army, obtained through his former pupil.

Passepoil kept a wine-shop near the Chatelet Prison, where soldiers and the prison guard resorted, and when Cocardasse lost a leg at some siege in the Low Countries, he took him in as partner. We forgot to say that the "Long Sword, kept by Passepoil and Cocardasse, Jr.," was noted for its pretty barmaids, selected by the first of the firm.



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